

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

*Printed in Great Britain
All rights reserved*



A ROMANY RAKLI

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

BY
“THE ROMANY RAWNY”

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS & MARROT, LTD.
54, BLOOMSBURY STREET, W.C.1

WILD as the speckled orchis that blossoms on forest moors, and bears, so folk-lore says, a love-charm at its root, are the people of the Hampshire moors, the tent dwellers in the forest bushes, and the caravan dwellers on the roughs. And so I have named these sketches of everyday gypsy life after the name these flowers bear amongst our forest folk—"Gypsies of the Heath."

BETTY GILLINGTON.

MANY thanks are due to Mr. FRED SHAW and
Mr. JOHN L. GILLINGTON for placing their beautiful
photographs of gypsy life and forest scenes at the
disposal of the Author.

CONTENTS

PART I

	PAGE
I. DAN-DAST.	9
II. TWO CARAVAN TALES	17
III. THE BETITSHAVI	29
IV. IT FELL ABOUT THE MARTINMAS	37
V. THE RIVER RUNNING BY	45
VI. STRAWBERRY RIPE	53
VII. THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF	65
VIII. UNCLE CHAWNEY	73
IX. THE APPLE-GREEN CARAVAN	90
X. MY SWEET SISTER	101
XI. SNOWDROPS IN THE WOOD	108

PART II

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING	113
THE SHOVIHĀN	128
SNAKES IN THE FOREST	140
KIT CANDLESTICKS	146
FOREST FIRES	157
THE WOLF'S CLAW AND THE WISHING RING . .	169
A RED ROSE FOR LOVE	176

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

A ROMANY RAKLI	<i>Frontispiece</i>
WINTER EVENING IN THE FOREST	<i>Facing Page</i> 37
THE ROMANY RAWNY ON THE ROAD	" 113
THE CAMP IN THE FOREST: WHO'S COMING?	" 166
GYPSY CHILDREN: TROUPE OF DANCERS	" 176

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

PART I

I

Dan-Dast

UNDER the folds of steep, heath-covered ridges rolling from West to East across country, between two great seaport towns, through the broad green hollows filled with furze, broom, and bracken, many a honey-clear peat-stream runs down from the dark heather pools and gravel springs on the hilltops, by way of Dan-Dast footbridge into the Miller's Pond.

Purple-brown and tawny-red, the bog-myrtle bushes spread along the edge of the spongy moss. The Didakeis call it "scent," tie the sprigs into bunches with "milkmaids," bind it with green rushes, and sell it in the towns, when its rosy jules are dim with dust of gold. The fairy forest of sweet-gale darkens the yellow-grey tussock grass of the marsh ; above the turf-bank bend the goat-willows and dwarf birches by the road passing on to Hound and Hamble, over Butlock's Heath ; and great grey-green oaks, knopped and gnarled, overhang those silver streaks of water among the reed-beds, where the

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

moorhens croon and crow. Some folk say that the marsh is called after Lord Dundas, who here bivouacked with his men at the time of the Russian war. But the likelier story is that the gypsies gave it the name, perhaps so long ago that none can remember whence it came. For, to reach Dan-Dast, one must pass perforce through the Romany quarter of hut and hovel, cabin and caravan.

A hundred years ago, when the bitterns, which boomed by night in all the plains around, gave their name to the village on the Western ridge, Gypsy Stanley, old Solomon, who was blind for fifty-four years, built his one-roomed house on the heath with his own hands, of mud and stone, thatched with furze. A merry garden lay in the midst of this heath, where the seaport townsfolk came out to take tea at merry-ripe time; a considerable colony of travelling people encamped under the fir trees, in black-boarded huts and caravans, whose band of fiddlers strolled from inn to inn all round the country, playing dance tunes and singing the strange ballads of those days—of highwayman and pedlar, squire and pressgang, smuggler and coastguardsman, pretty maid and farmer's boy. The old man in his chimney corner and the gypsy basket maker on the heath sing them still.

Great fields lay along the highway, where sheep were folded through the winter, sheltered by hedges of whitethorn, blackthorn, and blackberry, so high it

took a ladder to reach them ; flocks of goldfinches fluttered through the pasture lands ; the quail called across Sheepwash Hill, and crossbills swung in the fir trees.

But the birds have departed hence ; most of the merry trees are cut down ; and the Romany tribes, lovers of vast solitudes, like the bitterns, have shifted their camps to the further hill, to the " Bay " and Dan-Dast. And there the rosy brown Eastern beauty of a Stanley, the proud dark face of a Page, the secretive black eye of a Bowers may meet you and greet you from the camber-windows of the little white shanty with the green deck-house door, maybe ; from the blue porch of the black hut ; outside the pink cottage with honeycombed lozenges let in over its casements ; the six-sided house with the barge-boards under the thatch ; the slate-grey, red and yellow caravans gathered up on the " Bay " heath ; or from the blue-walled mud cottage with diamond panes and tall chimneys, in the sandy lane that leads down to Dan-Dast.

Well, the little white hovel has its daffodils in the orchard grass, the pink cottage has its japonica, and the black cabin its snow-on-the-mountain, the rock cress. And here through succeeding generations rests the Travellers' Camp, marrying and intermarrying, till about a score of names are merged into one vast colony, headed by those who share with the Lees the honour of belonging to the blood-royal

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

line, the Stanleys ; following the same trades as their Egyptian forefathers, who entered England full five hundred years ago ; tinkering, horse dealing, brush and basket making, chair mending. Speaking the same language—the Romanes—in four or five differents dialects, which even the babes and little ones are taught to lisp by the grandmother's hearth and the fire on the brown heath.

Down the steps of the slate-grey caravan with its yellow door a young woman slips out with the quick lissom grace of a panther ; and as she stands bare-headed in the wind, fierce and furtive expressions overcloud at intervals the beauty of her swarthy face, which is, indeed, almost as dark as that of David Stanley, who was almost black, the village folk declare. Her hair is of a tawny brown, curling into darker rings about her ears, hung with long golden eardrops ; her features are cast in Grecian mould, and her eyes are veiled from moment to moment by that blue-grey mist peculiar to her race, which renders them in their fixed intensity of gaze like an opaque blue-black stone, without light or lustre. Her tightly fitting gown, with its apple-green facings, shows to perfection the rounded curves of her strong young figure.

Up the road the Romany *chablo* drives fast in his high-crowned hat and his yellow waistcoat with gold buttons, and by his side in the clothes-prop cart sits the sturdy *tshai* ; she whose cheeks are like the apple blossom, whose teeth are milk-white as a two-year-

old, and whose eyes beneath the tight, round curls on her broad, white brow are golden-irised like a hawk's.

"A stout ash pole, my lady?" says the clothes-prop vendor, "He'll bend, but he won't break."

By the black hut, through the red gate and down the drove, a handsome curly-headed lad, he of the yellow neckerchief, who rides the rough roan like a lightning flash every night down the wooded hill, has tied the colt to an elder bush in his grandmother's garden, while he waits and watches, hempen halter in hand. The threshold of the black hut is strewn with withy twigs and wood litter; inside the open door, in the light of a hot wood fire, two dusky figures are crouched on the floor, almost hidden by the heap of withy shavings, their dark locks shaking about their nut-brown faces as they laugh and chin the *kaushta*, and with them, stately on a chair, in the chimney corner, sits the Big Mother of the royal tribe of the Kashtengres, the woodmen, knife in hand, the curved blade of the *tshâri* set in its roughly hewn wood handle. The withy comes from the wooded ponds of Waltham Chase, a part of Hampshire once noted for its deer stealers and smugglers, and for that celebrated gang of lawless men, the "Waltham Blacks"; but nowadays the sheep graze peacefully enough among its grassy slopes of wild thyme and harebells, when the rose-bay willow-herb blossoms hedge tall. A bundle of withy sticks is stacked on the table ready for splitting up into pegs, with a bunch of

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

kingcups laid on the top of the pile. On a low stool by the fireside sits the little gypsy girl Rhoda, in her black and yellow frock and big earrings of black and gold.

"Up to eleven and twelve at night has to *bitti*," says a gruff voice out of the gloom, "and goes on till the blood runs down!"

It is the voice of a dark man standing with his back to the red, setting sun, which seems to fill the whole of the little square window. And as he speaks he picks up the billhook, the *chinamengri*, and feels its edge with his finger. Like a dark red rose in fulness of bloom the *tshameri diken' rakli* Priscilla, all carmine blush and lustrous blackness of eyes and hair, whose coiled plaits rise to purple gloss in their half lights, gets up laughing to *tshuv* the *kekawbi* on the *yog*. The kettle filled, she subsides into her withy heap again, and five crook-bladed knives flash faster in the firelight to the wild gypsy chorus of "Brannin on the Moor."

"It's of a fearless highwayman a story I will tell,
His name was Willy Brannin, in Ireland he did dwell ;
And on the Liveret Hills he commenced his wild career,
Where every wealthy gentleman before him shook with fear."

The sweet, sad refrain rings through the hut, rising and falling like wailing wind :—

" Brannin on the moor !
Brannin on the moor !
Bold and undaunted stood young Brannin on the moor !

One night he robbed a packman, his name was Pedlar Bawn ;
They travelled on together, till the day began to dawn.
The pedlar found his money gone, likewise his watch and
chain ;

He at once encountered Brannin and robbed him back again !

When Brannin found the packman was as good a man as he,
He took him on the king's highway a companion for to be.
The pedlar threw away his pack without any more delay,
And proved a faithful comrade until his dying day.

One day upon the highway as Willy he went down,
He met the Mayor of Chelsea a mile outside the town ;
The Mayor he knew his features. 'I think, young man,'
said he,
'That your name is Willy Brannin, so you must come along
with me !'

As Brannin's wife was going to town, provisions for to buy,
When she saw her Willy she began to weep and cry ;
He says, 'Give me the tenpenny !' As soon as Willy spoke,
She handed him the blunderbuss from underneath her cloak.

Then Brannin being an outlaw upon the mountains high,
Tho' cavalry and infantry to take him they did try.
He laughed at them with scorn, until at length 'tis said,
By a false-hearted young man he was basely betrayed.

In the county of Tipperary, to a place they call Clomore,
Willy Brannin and his comrade that day did suffer sore ;
They lay amongst the fern which grew thick upon the field,
And nine wounds they did receive before that they would yield.

Farewell unto my wife, and to my children three !
Likewise my aged father, who might shed tears for me ;
And to my loving mother, who tore her grey locks and cried .
'I wish that Willy Brannin, in your cradle you had died !'

Brannin on the moor !
Brannin on the moor !

Bold and undaunted stood young Brannin on the moor !"

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

With full, deep notes, the Big Mother ends her song, free and strong as the storm thrush in the birchen copse when the moon rises rose-flushed over the ring of firs on Sheepwash Hill. Outside the black hut, the wind-swept heath and the wind-rocked firs on the ridge, in the glory of the grey spring night, set the blood a-throbbing through one's veins, even as the sap rises red in the gorse.

The dark man goes up the drove and unties the horse rope from the elder tree. "*Sati!*" he calls back. "*Dik ya in the sali!*"

The bog-myrtle's resinous flower dust, shaken by a startled moorhen, drifts like golden smoke through the marsh twilight, where the gravel streams run, ripple and bubble down to Dan-Dast. And in the deepening silence, as his horse's hoofs rattle up the road, the dark man's wild, mournful chant dies away in the dusk.

"Brannin on the moor,
Brannin on the moor,
Bold and undaunted stood young Brannin on the moor!"

II

Caravan Tales

I. MARBLE-STONES

THE caravans jolt slowly, heavily down the hot street with bracken bunches tied to the windows and to the horses' heads, followed by the Irish staghound, the black lurcher, and the greyhound. Whom do they belong to? Stanleys, Pages, Whites, of Hampshire and the New Forest? Smiths and Coopers of Dorset? Penfolds of Surrey, or Bucklands of Devon? We may perchance find any or all representatives of these gypsy tribes on the Shoalwater heath up the Portsmouth road. Take the road leading north-east off the highway, on the summit of Sheepwash Hill. It is well-known to all "travellers," and it leads you through the squalor of a country slum, whose inhabitants are a combination of seafarers, costermongers, half-caste gypsies, and poachers, and whose dress exhibits a like mixture, correspondingly; so do the houses; wooden shanties with deck-house windows, clay

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

hovels with honeycombed borders running under the eaves, toadstool thatches, and low white cottages. Before you come to the house with the crooked chimney and the honeycombing studded with bits of glass bottles, you must take the turn to the left, down a sandy lane and on to a wide brown common all purple heather, white gravel patches, and broom-bushes, the stronghold of south country gypsies. Far away across the heath lies a bright green caravan with red windows, the travelling house of the younger Stanleys, whose people have camped here for generations. In the middle distance stands a dwarfish apple-green caravan, with smoke issuing from its stovepipe, and a low, round tent hooped over the ground beside it, round which some bare-legged girls are playing. In the foreground are grouped three or four brown and red caravans, with fires aglow on the short dry grass, horses tethered among the bracken and tents pitched among the mallows ; baskets of withy canes and plaited rushes are piled in carts close by. They have just returned from Sherborne Fair and Candlebrake Hill, and the whole company are dog-tired. The black lurcher and the staghound lie dozing in the grass, the tabby cat sits motionless on the top of the caravan step ; from the interior proceeds the sound of profound snoring. Two women are crouched close against the wheels, the younger, a dark, sweet-faced woman, wearing a silver wedding-ring, has

CARAVAN TALES

her hand over her eyes, and hardly looks up ; the older woman, of evil countenance, exchanges words with her in an undertone in the Romany tongue.

The second time, I bring my painting things up to the common with me. There is a grey and blue August sky above the caravans, the carts, the yellow bent-grass, and the green broom bushes on the wide heath. And there are seven gypsy children, extremely unwashed and extremely merry, sitting round me in the heath as I paint, telling old stories, singing old rhyming couplets, and asking old riddles, which have been handed down for ages past, while Rough the staghound and Bob the lurcher romp round the circle, and the mother boils a pot over the fire for supper. There is Johnny, wearing a red-and-yellow handkerchief of gorgeous dye knotted round his neck, brown corduroys held up to his breast by equally gorgeous braces, a blue shirt and a sleeveless jacket. There is Charlotte, in a pink cotton blouse over a blue bodice, a black skirt and tan stockings—shoeless. There is Betsy, the narrator of fairy tales, arrayed in footless stockings, an old black bodice and a plaid skirt, and her hair tied back in a plait with blue and black ribbons. She used to go all round among the tents hearing these stories and asking strange riddles ; and now she is telling the thrilling tale of "Marble-Stones" to a highly-interested and sympathetic audience.

"There were once two little girls. One was called

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Pepper, and the other was called Salt. Pepper was the mother's girl, and Salt was the father's girl. One day the mother said to Salt, when the father was gone out: 'Fetch a comb, and I'll comb your hair.' So she did; but the mother pulled so, because her hair was all in a tangle, that the little girl holloaed out. Then the mother said: 'If you do that again I'll break your head!' Then Salt sang:—

Mother, O mother, don't break my bones,
Or I shall lie under the cold marble-stones !

But the mother pulled her hair again with the comb, and Salt screamed out, and the mother got the hatchet and cut her head off, and made it into a pudding for the father's supper. When the father came home he asked where his little girl was; and a little bird sang outside:—

Father, O father, don't pick my bones,
For I'm layin' under the cold marble stones !

Then he knew something wrong had happened to his little girl, and when he opened the pudding he saw one of her hairs Then the little bird sang out:—

Father, O father, look up the chimbley
And see what God'll send you !

(A gold watch and chain !) Then it sang again:—

Pepper, O Pepper, look up the chimbley,
And see what God'll send you !

CARAVAN TALES

(A doll and a pram !) Then it sang :—

Mother, O mother, look up the chimbley,
And see what God'll send you !

And when she looked up, a lot of stones and bricks
and mortar came tumbling down on her head and
killed her ? ”

“ Shall I tell you the story of the Old Witch ? ”
The dogs were thumped vigorously and made to lie
quiet in the grass, while Betsy continued :—

“ There was once an old witch who lived in a
glass house, and one day she met a little girl who
hadn’t got no mother nor nothin’, and she said to
her : ‘ Sweep my house out, but don’t break none of
my glass, and don’t take the penny I’ve put on the
table.’ But the little girl took the penny and ran
away, and the old witch ran after her ; and she came
to an old apple-tree and sang :—

Apple-tree, apple-tree, hide me !
Or else the old witch will find me !

But the apple-tree wouldn’t hide her ! Then she
came to a pear-tree and she sang : ‘ Pear-tree, pear-
tree, hide me ! ’ But the pear-tree wouldn’t. Then she
came to a cherry-tree and sang : ‘ Cherry-tree,
cherry-tree hide me ! ’ But it wouldn’t. Then she
came to the baker and sang : ‘ Baker, O baker, hide
me ! ’ And the baker put her inside his oven, and
she was burnt up and he ate her ! ”

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

The story-telling and the sitting both were brought to an abrupt conclusion by the boys, Johnny and Davey, rolling over and over fighting among the broom-bushes, and by a cousin from the other caravan running up and scratching Betsy's brown cheek, whereupon she jumped up from the grass and chivvied her all over the common, and catching her among the caravans slapped her face; then, returning, took up her former position in the broken ring. It was in this manner that the painting and the story-telling proceeded all that afternoon.

"And what would *you* do if the old witch ran after you? If I had been the little girl I should have run home," said I, when Betsy had settled down once more.

"Ah, and so should I! But that poor little girl, you see, hadn't got ne'er a home!" Betsy answered.

Afterwards this bit of conversation recurred to me rather vividly. Meantime, the afternoon was drawing to a close, and I gathered up my campstool to depart and bid farewell to the gypsy-mother. Three gypsy men in tall peaked hats came stalking up the side of the broom-patch.

"You've got a great smoke on here, mother!" they observed. But they were alluding, not to the fire over which her pot was steaming, but to the stranger in the camp.

II. DANGER

WHO is it says the third time is always the dangerous time? It is a wild, breezy afternoon with rainshowers at intervals spitting like an angry cat. A brown butterfly flits up the sandy track before me, and somehow, as I follow, there comes the thought of danger out of the possibilities of the future—whence and why I know not, and immediately laugh it away from me. The smoke of the gypsies' fire rises between the brown caravans, and the apple-green caravan, which had been away travelling, had come back to the heath, and is drawn up close to the sandy road. The dogs are running to and fro in some excitement, and from the shelter of the green caravan, where a rough-visaged man is nursing a baby on his knee, amid a swarm of ragged urchins, the dark, beautiful face of the young gypsy mother comes foremost to greet me: "A stormy day for you, my lady!"

They crowded round me on the common, men, women and children—but two were missing, the elder woman and her niece Betsy. "In the caravan," the latter was, "doing herself up," the mother explained; and Betsy presently emerged thence, barefooted, in a pink blouse and a green plaid skirt, her

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

face all swollen and smeared, blubbering audibly. All the men burst into a sinister laugh. "Let her come as she is! She'll make a pretty pictur'! Come on, Betsy, and have your face took."

"What's the matter?" "She's upset," explained the unshaven man who had nursed the baby. "What's upset her?" There was no answer, but after I had half succeeded in extricating myself from the impossible tangle of gypsies of all sorts and sizes who had collected round me, Betsy approached, her brown face smudged with crying, her grey eyes full of tears, and threw herself on the grass beside me, holding out a piece of lace. "There! That's for you. I kept it for you, as I said I should." Then she put herself in position. The old woman, her aunt, had been slapping her face, she whispered, sobbing. I had just taken up the paint-brush when a step advanced quickly over the heath, a sharp voice called out to me, and on looking up I met the red, angry eyes of the old virago.

How is it that since time immemorial the old gypsy woman has fallen soul of the *Garujos*? Antagonistic, suspicious, full of hatred and malice, spite and envy, has she been ever since Mrs. Herne did her utmost to thwart and frustrate the Romany Rye, and the gypsy-girl's Bee-bee first of all poisoned him with the "pretty *manricli*," and then tried to finish him off by beating in the walls of his tent when he was lying sick unto death: "What

CARAVAN TALES

is the gentleman of the house about that he is so quiet? Is the gentleman of the house darning his stockings?"

Putting her evil face close up to mine, Betsy's aunt accused me in strident tones, with menace expressed in every feature of her face, every motion of her figure, every gesture of her upraised hand, of favouring the other children and leaving hers out, when her boy was the making of the picture; and then, changing her tactics suddenly and without warning, she declared she wouldn't have her boy shown all round the country for people to stare at. He must be struck out of the picture! "Strike him out, I say! strike him out, or——" and she advanced nearer with uplifted forefinger threateningly upraised towards the painting, and staring me in the face with her red eyes. I was about to put my brush across the figure when it occurred to me in time that were I to fulfil her behest she would instantly go for me like a wild cat. Argument, conciliation, promise, all had no avail. She was within an inch of me; could hardly hold her hands off me. If I escaped from the ground she would have followed, and set the dogs or the men of her caravan upon me. Betsy here put in that she was drunk, and she turned aside from me to vent her venom on the girl. There was my only chance; I made for the caravan, and, reaching it in safety, stumbled up the broken steps, trembling from head to foot. The dark face of the young mother beckoned

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

me in, and when Betsy ran blubbering in terror up the steps after me, carrying all my belongings, she was sent to fetch a cup of water; I had turned deathly white, they afterwards told me. Meanwhile the enemy was dancing all over the common outside, inquiring satirically, "Who was drunk?" and finally she ran screaming round and round our caravan, shrieking curses and bellowing foul language. The baby, who was sitting outside, was terrified, and began to cry. It also was hauled up into the caravan by the frightened mother's order; the rest of the little ones huddled in on the floor. There we all sat, and the half-door was bolted. The old woman, goaded now into madness, raged outside, shouting opprobrious epithets at all, including the inmates of the green caravan, and ended by going off into wild fits of demoniac laughter, while she made the final circuit of our refuge. "Hearken to her!" said Betsy, turning very pale in her turn. "And she shied away the red tie you gave Johnny and trampled it into the heath!" "Be quiet, she won't hurt you!" ordered the calm but thoroughly frightened mother. "Oh, why don't the men stop her?" I cried. "Hush!" advised the gypsy, warningly. Then I remembered that her husband was gone—locked up for fourteen days for letting his horses stray on the common (in an evil hour for all of us), that Betsy's uncle and his two brothers were ranged on the enemy's side, as they were all of the same caravan, and that the enemy was doubtless

CARAVAN TALES

listening to what we said through the open window. Recovering soon, I viewed my surroundings. There were pictures on the wall, and beds in a bunk at the far end where I sat hidden in the background ; an open fireplace with a big black stovepipe passing through the roof took up half the room ; and a high brown oak chest, which also served as a table, stood under the window.

Presently a deep silence fell outside. What was the meaning of the strange stillness ? I arranged to go at once if Betsy would come with me off the ground, carrying my things. "So she shall, my lady ; but don't take her no further than the end of the road, will you ?" Tearing the red apron from my waist, and the silver ring—my promised gift to Betsy—off my finger, I hurriedly left them in the gypsy's keeping. Betsy sprang down, with a shawl flung over her to conceal my belongings, and raced over the heath. A hasty shake of the brown hand, and a "Good-bye and God bless you, my lady," from the brown-eyed gypsy, and I ran with Betsy across the common and down the sandy track leading into North East Road.

At the best of times one almost requires a passport to enter this road, but now danger lurks in every corner of it. In every dark heather-clump I see the livid face, the red eyes, the skinny forefinger.

Somewhere or somehow I may meet again the

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

grey-eyed round-faced gypsy girl, and the heather-eyed gypsy woman, but never again shall I sit in the gypsy ring on a summer afternoon on the grass listening to Betsy's fairy tales.

And the brown caravans have left for Porchester Fair.

III

The Betitshavi

WHEN the Gorgiko Rauni came for the second time to the camp on the common the dim doors of December were closing behind her. Already the twilight lengthened, for the shortest day was over ; and Sheepwash Hill lay in softest gradation of colour to the cold sunlight, laid on, as it were, with a full brush—purple, russet, pale red, and amber brown. A crimson sun was dropping below the rim of the western heath behind the Romany camp, while before it upcurved the rosy shell of the lustrous winter moon. Grey smoke of camp fires rose in rings at the end of the cart-track, and as the Rawny drew nigh, she saw the red glow of gypsy-fires where the dingy slate-grey caravan, the brown and grey and the green and red vans stood ranged in a square on the bare frozen sod. A greyhound and a lurcher shivered against the furze bushes by the entrance ; an ancient crone tended a pot on the brazier ; and inside the dingy caravan the sound of a child's cry reached the Rawny's ears ; 'twas the voice of Baby Jim.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

The young gypsy mother, whose face is as brown as an acorn, as red as a hawthorn berry, whose teeth are white as a nut kernel, and whose eyes have the hazel-brown of winter woods, was at first glance too running up into her caravan in utter confusion ; but a second glance brought her forward to meet the Rawny with a smiling welcome, and—

“ O, my lady, it’s never you ! We thought you must have gone away ! I’ve got a little seven-months baby since I saw you last ! ” she said.

So a little rolled-up bundle, wrapped in a red and green shawl, was carried down the steps, and the Rawny beheld the Baby Jim’s face for the first time.

“ A regular little Romany,” she said, “ and oh, what lovely eyes ! ”

Dark curling hair, eyes of dense blackness, veiled by a blue filmy mist, like the dusky blue of skies on a starry night ; a fringe of dark lashes overshadowing a brown, tear-stained cheek. This was Baby Jim.

And it grew bitterly cold in the camp as the sun went down. Some *chablos* with uncouth cries and shouts were harnessing the pony with the silver harness to the green cart with a picture of the sun on each panel ; the *rakli* with a complexion like wild-apple blossom was romping round the cart on the sandy track, and a swarm of unkempt, bare-footed *tschavis* ran back and forward, laughing and shrieking.

Then the Rawny turned to leave the camp ; but

before she bade good-bye to the baby's mother, she in her turn produced a little bundle, which was hurriedly hoisted up the van steps. A jar of honey for the children, a much worn yellow silk blouse with various other left-off garments, and a necklace of Turkish beads in a red soap-box.

"O, my lady, I gave you the left hand!" depre-
cated the gypsy at parting. For on her right arm
slept Baby Jim.

"Never mind, perhaps it's for luck!" replied the
Rawny.

"To change the luck!" laughed the gypsy.

In the month of April, when men carry great
bavins of furze-bloom shoulder high across Sheep-
wash Hill, and the Star Sirius changes from blue to
green, from red to gold, and from white to silver,
above the budding apple-trees, one may count as
many as eight caravans on the Common. But the
dingy grey caravan, which never travels, is full of
primrose-light, for the whole of Baby Jim's horde
have been out "a-primrosing to Durley." There is
Liberty, the eldest boy, named after his dades;
Freedom, the eldest girl, and Ellen, the next, who
wears the necklace of Turkish beads; Sampson, a
four-year-old youngster, whose smile is nearly as broad
as himself; and last, not least, Baby Jim. All the
children are sitting on the steps or looking over the
door hatch, and behind them one can see the gilt-
framed mirror hanging over the dark oak locker

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

with its old china bowl, and in the background the two-decker bed with its red and yellow curtains.

"I wasn't borned here," confides Freedom to the Rawny; "I was borned in a country very far away, and a *lady* took me, and I was called Freedom. It's a funny name to have."

Liberty is sent up the steps to bring the lady out a few bunches of primroses, and returns with her two hands full of the sweet things, smelling of honey, fresh earth, and new birth.

Jim, who has made himself black from head to foot, is also brought out to welcome the lady, which he does by immediately rolling over and over in the wet black peat under the van and making his brown face more smeary than ever with mingled mud and tears.

But as yet no baptism save that of the snow, the rain and the sea mist has ever bedewed Baby Jim's rumpled brow. He has known no second birth. Therefore, says the Rawny, he ought to be carried to the font of the little church on the hill this very next Sunday, for it was safer he should be christened soon and no more time should be lost about it. And the gypsy mother gave her word that so it should be. Only Jim had no clothes to be taken to church in! So towards the end of one May day, when deep breaths of broom and hawthorn heaved fragrance through the gloaming, the Gorgiko Rauni met the Romany *tshai* up the road—a tall figure, in draggled

THE BETITSHAVI

multi-coloured, faded garments, hardly distinguishable between a man and a woman in the dim light, with the baby under her arm, going "up-along to pick ferns on the heath with her husband," she said, showing her even white teeth in a broad smile. But the Rawny felt she had, with the Romany's infallible instinct which foretells a stranger's approach, met and intercepted her on the way to the camp.

Then and there she handed over Baby Jim's white christening frock, and once more the gypsy plighted her troth with the Gorgiko Rauni to meet in three days' time at the little church on the hill.

Her promises fell short of fulfilment, however, for the Sunday evening came but with it no Baby Jim. And three weeks passed away. At last came a Sunday when the "zuck, zuck" of the nightingale rang over the fringe of the heath, where birches bend over bowers of hawthorn ; sweet scents of lime, bean and strawberry-blossom followed each other all along the way to church, and the bell clanged for Evensong ; just before service began half a dozen babies in long white gowns, their sleeves tied up with blue, were being rocked to and fro in motherly arms, whilst their respective sponsors, country roughs who could neither read nor understand nor respond to a single word of the sacred service they were to take part in, arranged themselves giggling round the font.

But no Baby Jim appeared amidst that singularly unattractive assemblage of men, women and babies.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

The bell had ceased to clang, the paraffin lamps were lit and added their penetrating odours to those of boots and hair oil. But still no Jim.

And the doors were shut.

"Hath this child been already baptised, or no?" The voice of the Vicar roused the Rawny from the painful reverie into which she had fallen, while she strained her ears to listen for approaching footsteps, and scanned with anxious perturbation the countenances of the country lads and lasses who were straggling into the back seats. The baptismal service had commenced. Had the Romanies played the Rawny false for the second time?

All at once there was a flash of brilliant colour, a glow of sun-browned faces, scarlet lips, peach red cheeks and purple glossed black tresses; five gypsies trooped merrily into church as if tramping to the sound of fiddle, fife and tambourine and took their places around the font.

Baby Jim in a red cap, and a pinafore tied with crumpled red ribbons, led the way in his mother's arms; close at her heels walked his young aunt Priscilla, in a blouse of dazzling rose pink silk, a neckerchief of red and yellow, and a big black hat with drooping feathers—her golden earrings dangling against the dusky contour of her oval cheeks. Two of Baby Jim's uncles followed next, horsey, hobble-dehoy lads with thick hair plastered down to their eyebrows, sporting the usual gypsy colours of red

THE BETITSHAVI

and orange round their necks. Last of all came Liberty the elder, soberly dressed enough, his demeanour, as well as all the members of the tribe present on this occasion, characterised by that calm pride of bearing which distinguishes those of the Royal Race. With the exception of Baby Jim, who beat his mother's face with his fist, fighting hard for release, and pulled her dark locks about her face. Finally he struggled out of her grasp, and escaped to his two uncles, whom he clasped round the legs and refused to quit.

Now the church was decorated with drooping boughs of golden laburnum, white rhododendrons, big bunches of yellow broom, and deepest crimson Whitsun roses—for it was Whitsun. So when Baby Jim came to be christened it was in a font whose rim was hedged round with white lilac, pale jonquils, and pheasant's eye narcissus bending to the water's brim. . . .

“We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him with the sign of the Cross.” . . .

The moment, so breathlessly watched and waited for, had arrived at last, and when the old Vicar took the little gypsy into his white-robed arms, against which the little dark head rested quite quietly, the bosom of his mother heaved with a half-repressed sob, and the Rawny's heart beat in sympathy, while her eyes filled with tears of mingled relief, hope and joy. . . .

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"In token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and to fight manfully under His banner."

So that May night, among the dew-sprinkled blossoms of wood, garden and heath, Baby Jim was born anew.

Once more the days are drawing out fast. The days of the drear-nighted winter are swinging back on their hinges, and all the caravans on the common will soon be "jassen' up the drom." And in the dingy caravan which never travels Baby Jim's mother will fasten over her neck the yellow silk handkerchief, drawn through the foreign ring brooch, which the Rawny gave her in remembrance of Baby Jim's new birth, when she carries him with her *rôzya* basket into town, across the broad white water.

WINTER EVENING IN THE FOREST



IV

It Fell about the Martinmas

SHOWERS of gold and silver were falling from the trees as the Rawny went down the hill on the morning of the November Fair.

Though the sun was still warm, the dew lay heavy and cold on the long sweet grass of the field outside the Abbey Town, which has held its Charter ever since the time when Forest folk tendered their Long-Cross pence at the Fair.

At an early hour, a gypsy horse with silver trappings was driven up the village street at a rattling pace ; cart after cart followed, some with forest colts and some with Exmoor ponies trotting behind. In a couple of hours' time, all the Romany folk would meet again in the green Fair Field, with farmer and squire, driver and horse-dealer, and all the riff-raff of the country town,

Here is the Rommanichal with his *diklo* of scarlet and green, and his drab riding-coat, whose lappels are adorned with rows of silver horse-shoes. There stands the gypsy grandmother from the black hut,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

and the horse-dealer's wife from the caravans under the fir trees. Wherever the Rawny glances about the field, it is to catch the merry eye of one of our own tribe, scattered here and there, or clustered in groups amongst the onlookers.

Presently the Rawny will join one or other of these groups ; but meanwhile she would see what is to be seen, whilst the cattle and sheep in the adjacent meadow mingle their lowings and bleatings with the cries of the Cheap Jacks. At the entrance to the field stands a ginger-bread stall, where are vended the brandy-snaps peculiar to the Martinmas Fair. On the other side, immediately fronting the passers in , at the gate, a razor and knife seller is displaying his wares. Along the field side are ranged caravans and tilted carts, and outside the first and foremost of the vans a table is set, loaded with gorgeous array of tureens, plates and dishes of old purple, red and gilded china.

“Good-morning, my lady ! Couldn't anyone eat out of such dishes as those ?”

Two dark faces peered out of the hatch door ; one withered and brown with a large green and yellow bandana handkerchief crossed over her bosom ; the second, fresh and young with big square silver earrings dangling against the dusky oval of her aughing face.

“Certainly they would !” the Rawny answered the dame who had divined her thought. “And maybe

IT FELL ABOUT THE MARTINMAS

will by-and-by, when the time comes!" she said to herself. "The face of an Egyptian!" she further pondered, gazing at the girl.

"What's your name?"

"My name is Lee, my lady!" (Her name was, truth to tell, either Fenner or Pennifer). "You've got a lucky face, my lady! There's a great change coming soon, and your luck will turn!" (Truer words were never spoken.)

"Do you think so?"

"I know it, my lady!"

The Rawny nods good-bye, and disappears into the midst of the crowd, where she finds and joins friends of our own tribe; they are listening alternately to the shouts of a Cheap Jack selling blue and green gig umbrellas, and a town herbalist discoursing volubly of his wonderful herb-medicines; whilst a second Cheap Jack spreads out horse-cloths on the grass.

Strolling off again, she nods to him of the silver horse-shoes, who is talking to an Irish horse-dealer, and stands further down the field watching the black Irish cobs which form the chief centre of attraction at the November Fair.

Amidst the wild cries of the Irish horse-men the running of the frightened horses, the waving of red flags, the dispersing of the crowd—some of the bystanders being knocked down by the trampling hoofs and the rush of an excited throng—the

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

remembrance of a dream stole over her. She dreamed the night before last that she was sitting at a table in the midst of a number of Romany folk—with whom she was feasting.

And now this dream is about to be realised.

For upon retracing her steps to the caravans in search of food and drink, she finds that by this time a number of men and women are gathered together round a brazier on the grass, with steaming brass and copper kettles set around. She comes up to the brown-faced elderly woman who had addressed her on her first entering the field.

“*Del mandy some piameskri for a shaori, mi dje?*”

“*Ova, ovaley, mi rakli!* Of course you shall, my dear!” She takes her seat on the cart-shaft.

“Get out o’ that, you *dinnelos*!” She cries to the young men. “Give the *rakli* a chair! *Del the rakli a scamrun!*”

“O, the *rakli*! The *rakli*!” A horsey youth is rocking himself to and fro with laughter. “*Ei dordi, the rakli!*”

“Well?” says she, sharply. “Didn’t you hear what she said? She’s a real Romany *chai*! I can tell that!” And forthwith she is offered, with a sweep of the gypsy’s hand, indicating the old china service of purple, red and gold, all the viands (consisting of piles of meat and vegetables) displayed thereon. Huge cups and mugs of tea were handed round, and plates of bread and butter cut, amid much

IT FELL ABOUT THE MARTINMAS

gypsy jesting, talking and laughter ; while the girl with the Egyptian face breaks into a pretty little Romany ditty as she dances a *chavi* on her knee. In these days only imperfectly understanding or speaking the Romany tongue, the Rawny could grasp but a word here and there of all the *rokkerin* that was going on around her. Meanwhile, she who had called herself Mrs. Lee, and a tall sweet-faced elderly woman with wavy hair turning grey and parted in the middle, asked questions.

“Would you like this young man to drive yer home, after Fair’s over ?” And the gypsy nodded towards the youth who sat near her, being the same who had laughed so immoderately at the appellation of *rakli* being bestowed on her.

This time, as she hesitated and looked towards him, he shook his head gravely enough.

“She wouldn’t like it !”

“What ?”

“No, she wouldn’t like for to do it, I tells yer !
I knows this lady !”

“What ?”

The gaze of all the circle were concentrated upon him. The Rawny felt uncomfortable to say the least of it. Her secret was out.

“Yes, I knows her quite well ! She lives near ‘ome !” After a series of roundabout questions to find out the name of the village and the street, she went on another tack.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"Wouldn't we put you up for the night along o' we, my dear?"

The offer was tempting, but she slowly declined the invitation, on the plea that her mother and brother would be expecting her home that night.

But the elder gypsy's scrutiny became rather overpowering at times, so she was not sorry to divert her attention and that of the whole group, from herself, by strolling off to make purchases at the jam-puff and ginger-bread stall ; and on her returning to her seat, laden with a plentiful supply of cakes which were handed round to the entire company, she found the gypsy circle augmented by some of our own tribe, who, arriving late at the Fair, now came forward one after another to greet their Romani Rauni with outheld hands and smiles of welcome. Whereupon more tea was consumed, and more cakes were bought and handed round.

While on the outskirts of the camp, a ragged unkempt woman, extremely dark and extremely tall, being brown as an oak apple, with black locks hanging uncombed about her disheartened face, clad in nondescript garments bedraggled with mud, along with several equally dishevelled and ragged boys, kept watch over the troop of Exmoor ponies tied along the fence ; also of forlorn and disconsolate appearance, their long tails drooping to the ground. While this family passed in and out of the throng in dispirited fashion, a dissipated, horsey man with a

IT FELL ABOUT THE MARTINMAS

pallid, spotted unwholesome face, who had been loitering about the Fair field all day, and whose glance had just lit on this particular corner, came up and roughly demanded a cup of tea of the "Old girl" as he familiarly designated the gypsy-mother.

Immediately she placed another kettle on the brazier, giving the stranger a courteous assent.

But the Rawny caught his wandering eye, bent on mischief or evil-doing, travel round to herself and remain there. Instinct warned her to leave that circle, from which most of our own tribe had departed, before the strange horsey individual became obnoxious. By this time she whispered to the wavy-haired woman in the worst Romanes she ever remembered to have uttered (which must have been to the gypsy all but unintelligible), that if *that man* came, she should go.

Then the sunshine left the field, and it was time to think of returning home-along.

But before the Rawny left the town, she went up through the Hundred and past the Swan Inn, a black and white-timbered building, on whose sign-post, in the year 1733, a man was hung, whilst the woman who shared his guilt was burnt in the middle of the market-place.

And so she passes through the strange old town, the rough old town on the borders of the Forest, in whose every street run the fast streams of the water meadows ; whose abbey-bell rings curfew over the

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

reedy Test marshes. She enters within the abbey-doors, and behind a pillar, under the light of the great western window with its soft rose-reds, its glimmering, shimmering, deep sea-blues, kneeling by the tomb of the sleeping child, she offers up a prayer that good, and not evil, might come of this day's journey.

All the way home those same streams ripple and run beside her, till the great red-gold Martinmas moon rises from the mist, in the hush of the dusk-grey night.

How the moonlight gleams on those rushing waters ! It glitters and gleams even as the silver horseshoes on the gypsy's coat and the silver ornaments in the Egyptian girl's ear. "*Kushti rardi, tshavi !*" The water whispers as it runs, "Sweet dreams, *mirakli te-rardi !*"

V

The River Running By

AFTER all, it was not on the broad, brown heath that they all met again, but in the green meadow under the Downs, where the clear chalk stream rushes down, plashing and bubbling, through the grey Cathedral City, under the bridge, and through the open fields beyond the last inn. If one looked out of the caravan window, one could have tossed a coin into the boats that came rowing down the river.

But there is always one story inside another story, just as there is always one little stone inside the "lucky stones" which are to be found up on these Downs (those "eagle stones" found in the Barrows, which were once worn by women as charms in child-bearing).

And this story is that on that rainy winter's night, when the Rawny gave a caravan tea up on the heath, while she sat with Ellenda, who was "*chiving tin on the fidas*," inside her own red van with the galloping white horse painted on the door-panel waiting for the kettle to boil and the company to assemble, Ellenda

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

told the Rawny all about her marriage with him of the yellow neckerchief, and whispered to her concerning certain sweet hopes she had, and asked the Rawny to bring her something, even if it was "ever so small" a thing, to welcome the little stranger when it should arrive. And it was to come when the daffodils were in flower, after she had gone to join her mother's camp in the Bar End field, where the October Fair is held. So the Rawny gave her faithful promise that it should be so.

And one day of cold wind but dazzling sunshine, when the grey-green slopes of the Downs and the russet wood-slopes seemed to fling themselves forward to meet the new golden light, the Rawny took up her bundle and travelled to the grey old city outside of whose walls the camp lay. Past the Butter Cross she went, and over the bridge, past the Dog and Duck and the Black Boy, till she came to a standstill by the Bar Inn, not knowing which way to take next. And furthermore, there was no one who could show her, till all at once Sunna the gypsy boy happened to come down a side street with a rope bridle hanging out of his pocket and a loaf of bread buttoned up in his waistcoat. And she followed him by a series of footpaths to the camp in the Bar End Meadow.

Yes, there stood the three caravans of that tribe, with their horses grazing beside them, in the muddy grass alongside the river. Above them rose the great down with its crown of lank firs and spindly

THE RIVER RUNNING BY

beeches, walled in by rings, over whose mounds and dykes rolled the grey cloud shadows, alternately masking and unveiling their loneliness. There the wild thyme's tiny stalks reddens the moss and the fairy rings darken the grass, and the ground is strewn with brown beech husks, and by-and-by you will come to the Miz Maze winding in and out beyond those broken stumps that once fenced it round. Ah, there is an old story about the Mâze, and a very sorrowful one too—and the schoolboy who cut out these twisting circles with his knife, or as some say, tramped it out with his feet during those long weary weeks of homesick solitude, lay down to die, it is said, under these beech trees, whose spindling boughs creak and sway in the wind like a murderer's gibbet-chains.

But though the hoar frost has covered the slippery grass on the steep descent to windward of the Chalk Hills, and the cat-ice still whitens the ruts in the Bar End Meadow, up on the Downs the partridges are pairing, and above in the blue the larks are singing, for surely this is the first bright day of the year!

And all the camp has turned out to watch and to welcome the Rawny. Ellenda has come down the steps and is rokkeren' Romanes excitedly with her father Amalene and her two sisters, Georgina and Lovinya; whilst her husband, he of the yellow *poshnikus*, is shouting directions to the Rawny not to come through

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

the water-logged middle of the meadow but to take the path along the fence.

And soon inside Ellenda's van the kettle begins to hum cheerily on a hot coke-fire, the locker is spread with cups and plates, and Lovinya is going up into town to fetch some cakes, when she has put on her brown and red beads and made herself clean, as the others afterwards explain.

While the Rawny is leaning over the hatch, handing over a bit of silver and giving instructions what to buy, her eye falls on a hen bullfinch hopping about in a small cage hung outside the caravan.

"Let yer have that bird for sixpence, lady!" says he of the yellow neckerchief.

"I don't like birds to be kept cooped up in cages," she answers, shaking her head. "It's cruel, and I'd rather"—"give you sixpence to set it loose," she was about to add, but the gypsy shrugged his shoulders and swung round on his heel.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he said contemptuously.

"*Nothing*, is it?" The Rawny's eyes flashed her indignation. "It's *kindness*, that's what it is! *I* like birds to fly about in the free and open air!"

All the men assembled looked on with deep interest, listening intently.

"What did yer call that bird, lady?" He of the yellow neckerchief changed his voice, his face, his whole demeanour all in a moment from sulkiness to a serene suavity.

THE RIVER RUNNING BY

"A hen bullfinch—she'll never *sing*, you know, so it's no good——"

"A bullfinch!" exclaimed the wary one, not to be caught. "There you is now! D'yer 'ear that?" he shouted to the others. "A bullfinch the lady calls it! What did I tell yer?"

Here the Rawny, finding the fixed stare of the onlookers a trifle embarrassing, abandoned the bullfinch and withdrew into the shelter which the caravan afforded, meeting as she did so the young wife's uneasy gaze.

"What's Lovinya so long about? Isn't she ready yet?"

"She's *tovin'* herself!" says Georgina.

"Has she got the *dloovu*?" asks Ellenda.

"*Ovb!*" answered the gypsy girl.

And while they interpret their speech to the Rawny and are in the midst of teaching her several sentences it is necessary for one to know—such as "Help!" "Stop a bit!" "Hush!" and "That dog's dangerous!" he of the yellow *poshnikus* puts his dark head in over the door and coolly surveys the party, who appear to be stricken dumb in his presence, with an inscrutable smile. His wife breaks the silence by asking him rather sharply what he wants. His reply is reassuring.

"I wants 'alf a dinner!"

Whereupon Ellenda gets up and without a word reaches something down from her corner cupboard,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

and he pockets it and goes off with the other men and two of the horses.

Soon after this Lovinya returns all radiant with her bag of cakes and is asked to join the meal. She and Georgina sit down on the floor, Ellenda pours out the tea, and the Rawny is given hers, as a great compliment, in the biggest cup and saucer that ever was seen. Then they remember the children, left all alone, for Britannia their mother (who, like her namesake Britannia Lovel of old, is a wonderful lucky woman at the fortune telling), has gone out hawking in the town and nobody is looking after them.

"*Ai dawdi, dawdi! Dik at they tshavis runnin' after the mush!*" mutters Georgina, looking out at the window. And she calls them all up to the van. Alice comes dancing up the steps with a smile and a curtsey.

"How are you, my lady!" she calls out in her hoarse gypsy voice. The little plaits around her face bob too, and the silver coins shake in her ears. Chalky, dirty and disconsolate, is brought in and fed with bits of jam-puff. He seems to have lost some of his superfluous naughtiness. Britty is round and chubby as heretofore, and laughs as merrily as ever. And everyone laughs and chatters, *rokkereng* Romanes between whiles, and Ellenda, who says she does not know any Christian songs, gives them again the Romany song, a very curious ditty, with no tune

THE RIVER RUNNING BY

to boast of, which she sang at the caravan tea in the winter.

“Mandy well'd to pûv the grais
All around the stiggus oprey,
Here wels a mush to lel mi oprey !
Mandy stripped ovved to him and delled him in the pûr !
Sap mi diri datcheko the mush kured well !
All thro' the raklos a kickin' up a gôdli
The mush lell'd the grais.”

The afternoon wears on, and it is high time for the Rawny to think of bidding them all good-bye. Before she goes she would like to sing something for Ellenda to remember some day when trouble is hard at hand and there is none to help her. So, looking over the door, over the green field and away into the blue sky, over the great grey-green down with its grey crown of trees and the cloud shadows ever more passing over it, she sings, “I think when I read that sweet story of old,” and “Just as I am, without one plea,” while Ellenda sits with grave eyes and Georgina and Lovinya listen with softened faces, and the little ones’ round eyes gaze up into her own, silent, awed, and comforted.

Then she kisses Ellenda and takes leave of all in the Bar End Meadow Camp, while Alice, Chalky, and Britty, come dancing down the field with her.

And home she goes through the grey little town of the rushing waters, wearing a jonquil that Sunna had picked up and given her on the way to the camp that morning.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Two months afterwards, when the daffodils were in flower, a red caravan, whose driver wore an orange-yellow neckerchief, passed through the village and stopped near the Rawny's mother's gate. And in the porch stood Ellenda, very brown, very pretty, very subdued, bearing in her arms a little dark stranger wrapped in a red shawl. And that is all there is to this story, which after all is not the whole story, but only the beginning of the next, for like the lucky stone on the Down it always carries a little one along with it !

Strawberry Ripe

“TERRIBLE lovely they be, lady!” It was Vanlo, the gypsy boy who spoke. He leaned over the Rawny’s gate, holding the big bunch of sunset-golden, shell-pink and dark red roses for her while she tied the stalks together.

Vanlo’s shirt lay open so that his neck and chest were quite bare, except for the wisp of coloured neckerchief which he wore. In his hand he carried a forked hazel stick, which he had cut by the hedge as he and Walter journeyed joyously along this hot Sunday morning. For the two boys had tramped all the way from the strawberry fields across the river and were passing through the Rawny’s village. They had started early from the camp, without breakfast, and were hungry and thirsty, tired and dusty. And it happened that the Rawny met them in the street and offered them a bunch of flowers to take home to their mother. So they lay down under the hedge—which is always the gypsy’s friend by day and night—and while she went round the garden picking roses

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

they whispered to each other that they would have to take the seven mile road home if the Rawny didn't give them twopence, because they hadn't enough money between them to pay the Bridge toll.

"I'll meet you again across the water—so it's not good-bye for long!" were the Rawny's parting words to all her dark friends—the people in the black hut, the people of the fir tree camp and the people of the heath camp. Then one and all had shifted to the strawberry grounds over the river; first to "bed down" the plants with straw; secondly to pick the ripe fruit; lastly to "lay out the runners," when the fruit season ended.

And now it was in the full swing of the strawberry-ripe time; deep, glorious June-tide, "blue above lane and wall." Blue above the crimson clover field, and the pink-grey-green of the hay-swathes, and the bronzed green of the shimmery rye-grass. All along the fields lay buttercup banks and gardens of speedwell, where the hedge-growth was being cut to "warm the stack" before the first hay was carried. And over all the fields there floated a cool, salt breath from the harbour and the three brimming rivers.

"Be you a-coming, lady?" Vanlo, who is called Sunna for short, said: "You takes the halfpenny boat across" (the two boys had had a squabble as to which should tell the Rawny the best way), "and you'll see the vans right facing you over the water;

STRAWBERRY RIPE

and you comes up Cold-East Road, and you gets into Freemantle's fields, and there they all is! Ellenda and the baby and Sam and all!"

"And doesn't you remember little Alice and Britty and Chalky?" wistfully asked Walter.

Yes, of course she did, and sent many messages back to them all along with the bunch of roses.

But as the days came and went the Rawny's conscience pricked her whenever she thought of her promise. The way seemed all beset with thorns, so hindered was she from fulfilling her word; and so the weeks wore by, and the time was slipping away like the river tide. The merries grew ripe in the village, which was a sign that the strawberry season was all but ended and most of the travellers would be on the road. More's the pity, Sunna's father Amaline and all his tribe had already departed that afternoon she set off to find the camp. July was half over. The pink bindweed lay like the rosy faces of sleeping children on the parched grass by the wayside. The brambles were in flower and the yellow agrimony stood up tall and graceful in the fields through which she had to pass. The stacks smelt sweet in the shorn meadows, and the oats had grown nearly waist high.

The way seemed so long and lonely that afternoon that seeing a young man and woman in the act of jumping over the fence for a short cut across the fields, and being doubtful of the road herself, she

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

asked leave to join their company. And they assenting very cheerfully, considering they must have been sweethearts, they all went on together over field after field, till at last they found themselves in the crooked streets of the little old fishing village ; past the timber and mud houses with their blue-green doors and shutters ; past the Gun House, the Coppersmith's Row, the Victory Inn, till they reached the Sundial House on the hard, the Quay Inn, and the Crabhouse with its black tarred timber and mud walls, bulging over the weedy shore.

When she saw the Crabhouse she stopped short to bid her comrades good afternoon, supposing that they were going in for the visitors' customary crab and lobster tea. No such thing, however ! To her surprise and disappointment they appeared to have changed their plans, and calmly announced their intention of accompanying her across the river.

Her face fell at that ; for she had already guessed their half-concealed purpose to follow her and find out where she was going. Their curiosity, brimming over at every step they took, had reached its full height by the time they reached the Ferry House, when the young man openly demanded to know her movements. Reluctantly she had to admit she was having tea with some friends of hers over the water. Their gaze was fastened on her flushing face so that she felt it impossible to lift her eyes to search for the caravans which should by all accounts lie full in view

STRAWBERRY RIPE

on the further side. It now became a matter of conjecture whether she would be able to rid herself of her travelling companions, and she cast about in her mind for a means of baffling their too-evident intentions towards her. Perhaps she could give them the slip when they turned into the tea house on the other side, where black hulled fishing boats swung under the quay. Here again, however, her hopes were frustrated, for after she had hastily bidden them farewell on the beach she found they had followed her into an Inn yard, where she had stopped to ask directions of an ostler washing down a horse, and had overheard every word that had passed!—"Go straight along till you comes to the cross-roads," she was told; "keep to your left till you comes to where a stream of water runs under the road. There's a little red house at the corner. Ask your way again there. Caravans won't be fur off." Just as she came to the stream under the road, there met her a gypsy child with a small copper kettle in its hand. She called to someone inside a hedge and the gypsy mother's anxious face peered over. At the back of the hedge lay hidden a curious medley of tilted carts and hooped tents, and all manner of odds and ends put up for shelter, including a great green gig umbrella, such as one buys from a Cheap Jack at the Martinmas fair. The gypsy mother told her what to do.

"You goes out of that black gate across the field

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

and you goes on to your left till you comes to a house that stands all by itself. Then you'll see the water straight in front of you, and you takes a path that'll lead you right up to the vans. 'Tain't above five minutes' walk."

Then the Rawny wandered on till she came to a row of caravans at the top of a barley field. There was a black caravan with yellow windows that she didn't recognise, and the countenances of those watching her seemed also quite strange and unfriendly. Someone shouted warningly as she came nearer, and she raised her arm twice in answer. The next moment she found herself in the midst of a great horde of gypsies, men, women and children. Some were huddled under a hooped tent, some were crouching or lying on the ground, some were sitting round a trestle-board at their evening meal. An old woman and an old man about eighty with a grey, unshaven face looked up and answered her questions, not uncivilly, and asked her to sit down if she was tired.

But there was something sinister and backhanded going on amongst the younger men, which the Rawny was at a loss to account for just then. A pretty young woman with a spotted dark blue handkerchief tied over her dusky hair, a scarlet and yellow neckerchief, and a pink coral necklace, came up in a kindly manner, from one of the groups and took the Rawny under her charge.

STRAWBERRY RIPE

"It's Sam's Ellen she wants," she explained to the others.

"Well, there's Solomon's waggon down at the end there, and Sam's lays further on. All you've got to do is to go down this here lane, and you'll find 'em."

But where the rest of the tribe lay none of them would tell. Had the Rawny known then what came to her knowledge after, she would probably not have passed through that wild horde for all the world! For it was an enemy's camp, hostile to Sam and all his people, and the young men in it would have gone for Sam, could they get a sight of him, with hooks and sticks and kettle irons and whatever they could lay their hands on, even knives. They only held back from doing him some injury because Liberty, the father of little Liberty and Freedom, was coming out of Winchester gaol soon, and they stood in wholesome fear of him, for he could stand up to anyone of the whole lot of them, and beat him all round the ring.

As it was she went safely through the midst of them, followed by the stares of the dogs and the ribald laughter of the younger men, and turned straight into the prettiest little gypsy lane you ever saw, just like what you read of in the stories of your childhood—in 'Little Harry's Troubles,' or 'Disobedient Jane.' A narrow sandy path by a wood side, marked by the deep ruts of caravan wheels, shut in by bramble bushes, leading down hill to what are

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

called the Wood-nut fields, by the water. At right angles it struck off into a still more unfrequented track off which lay Solomon's van behind a furze hedge.

"Rhoda!"

A gypsy girl who had been standing with her back to the path, gazing out over the water, turned round and faced the Rawny with a great surprise mirrored in her grey eyes.

"O, you did give me a start! We thought as you couldn't be coming, you was so long!"

"Now you has come," shouted a rough voice over the hedge—the voice of him who wears the coat braided with silver horse-shoes at the November Fair—"you has to stand me a drink!"

"So I will!" laughed the Rawny back to him—"a drink of tea—if you'll come!"

And Rhoda led her off to the camp, talking merrily all the way. Yes, here they all are at last! The grandfather who makes the rush chairs and sings the "Robber and the Lady" to that pretty old tune; the grandmother who chins the *Kaushta* and has taught her to *rokker* the Romanes, coming out to greet the Rawny, and Priscilla's dark handsome face laughing out of the tent door. Here is Ellenda's red van, with the white horse painted on the door panel; and at the end of this strip of greensward stands Sally's green van; she of the forest, whose grandmother was the seventh child of a seventh child, and

STRAWBERRY RIPE

had wonderful luck with the *dukkerin*, whose old Romany book of magic was buried with her when she died.

And there sat the forest woman at supper surrounded by all her children. But she was darker of face, more sombre of eye and more forbidding of aspect than ever before, because the rest of the camp and herself had "had words," and she sided with her own tribe of the enemy's camp in the barley field.

And after the guest had taken off her hat in Ellenda's van she was offered a seat by the fireplace —three rows of bricks laid on the grass with a sheet of tin below and flat iron bar above to hold the kettle —while Rhoda fetches an armful of birch faggots from a bundle by the wood side, and kneeling on the grass blows the smouldering embers into a blaze.

As the red flame mounts higher and the kettle begins to hum, all the rest of the tribe come into camp, along with Ellenda, Sam and the baby ; and the Rawny begins to cut the cake, which is a present, she says, from the very best cake shop in all London.

"We'll be fancyin' ourselves gettin' *romadô'd* all over again!" laughs the grandmother.

Ellenda's blue teapot is taken from her corner cupboard, the milk-jug off the locker and the loaf which has been left on the footboard. Plates and dishes of old purple and gold, flower-painted Crown Derby are brought out of the tent, and Sally's Jim brings a gallon basket of strawberries to the trestle

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

table by the tent, where Ellenda is cutting bread and butter and distributing cups all round to the assembled company ; while they all talk together of the strawberry season that is going off and the hopping season that is coming on. And when the gold-banded wasps hover over the tea-board, Sam, who is sitting on a tree stump nursing the baby, declares "that means that money is a-comin' to yer! But we hasn't got much of it, has we?" he adds cheerfully. (Scarcely any, thought the Rawny, so far as she was concerned !)

Then they began to tell her of the very latest camp disturbance, caused by one Daisy, a wild-faced damsel with a fuzz of fair hair and tear-stained cheeks, who has been hired to look after the baby whilst its mother was at work in the strawberries.

"She's been a bad girl!" announces Ellenda, scowling. "She called Sam 'monkey face' and 'liar.'"

"Does you know the Kelleways of Shoalwater?" drawls the miscalled one to the Rawny. "What? Not know they?" he sneers ; "this is one of them!" and he indicates the delinquent with a contemptuous gesture as he turns to feed the fire. "She's a-laughin' now! She was *a-ruvvin'* (crying) just now!" he continues provokingly.

"Not a Romani!" says the Rawny, glancing at her, as she sat on the caravan steps munching sweet biscuits.

STRAWBERRY RIPE

"Not she! Too silly for one! Hasn't got that much sense!" he sneers.

It grows late and the Rawny must be getting home if she doesn't want to be overtaken by the darkness on lonely roads. Hastily she dips her hands into a bucket of water and dries them on her handkerchief, whilst Rhoda creeps into the tent to make herself presentable to come along with her Rawny.

Down the gypsy lane they all hurry together, climb the fence and stumble on to the stony shore; the dark gypsy girl with her silver earrings shaking, her bare brown locks waving in the soft sea wind, her torn gown catching on the briars. The wild-haired Daisy, on whose face tear stains and strawberry stains still struggle for supremacy, and between them both the Rawny, flushed and flurried, for fear she should miss her brother, who is bicycling down to meet her on the other side of the river. As they begin to run along shore they come full tilt against a courting couple seated on the paling.

"Found your friends, then?" leers the man, while the woman sniggers. And the horrified Rawny recognises her two road companions.

Luckily there is no time to speak, as she is running on to whistle for the ferry, the culprit Daisy, who has partly recovered her spirits, loitering behind to pick up little crabs off the mud.

"*Wust lis'dréy the pani!*" the Rawny calls back to her. "Hurry!"

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"She don't understand a word of the Romanis," says Rhoda contemptuously. "Why, only the other day I tells her to *jal* and fetch *mitshokurs* out of the tent, and she only stands and stares! A reg'lar *gawjo*, that she be!"

And so they take their places in the ferry boat—surely as strange a trio as ever crossed the deep green waters of the Hamble river at strawberry-ripe time—and bid each other good-bye in the village street, having seen the Rawny safely on her way home.

"Good night! *Kushti* dreams *te-rardi*!"

The Yellow Handkerchief

A DARK, sweet face, with downcast eyes, whose black lashes droop over a rose-brown cheek ; abundance of dark hair, plaited and braided, and parted over an olive and tawny brow ; a dark lock secured by a comb over each of the shell-like ears. An orange-yellow handkerchief knotted loosely round a creamy throat. This is Ellenda's portrait ; and as the painter gazes at her work, she steps back through five fateful and eventful years, and finds herself going up Merry Oak Lane, in the golden light of a November afternoon, when the acorns are falling.

She opens the black gate of the farmyard, and there, in the middle of a green field, damp with rising mists, stands the red and green caravan.

The Paisley shawl that wraps the baby when its mother goes a-hawking is hung across the window behind Ellenda's dark head. Through the little curtained casement opposite a mellow light filters in through the sunlit yellow-brown oaks in the hedge, and a soft light comes in at the open door—the green,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

gilded gypsy door, with the white horse painted on the midmost panel. Sam's own white horse grazes in the field outside, where he himself sits on the grass "chinnen the *kaushta*" for Ellenda's clothes-pegs.

As yet the hot coke and ash-wood fire in the stove had not begun to cast its red glow around the caravan's interior; the two-decker bed, in whose top berth the baby with the nightshade charm round its neck to aid its teething lies sleeping behind the gaudy curtains, is still in dusky shadow, no firelight falls on the dark oak chest with the blue teapot, nor in the mirror on the wall.

The painter has doffed her red cap and jacket and laid them on the bed beside the baby. She has put Ellenda in position and opened her paint-box. But where are the ear-rings? Ellenda starts guiltily.

"The ear-rings is lost! I hasn't had any this long while."

"Well, borrow a pair from some of the others against the next time. But where's your yellow handkerchief?"

Ellenda's wonderful dark-irised blue-grey eyes lift for a moment as she glances shiftily around.

"'Twasn't my yellow handkercher! 'Twas Sam's! There he is with it on!"

Her husband, hearing his name spoken, comes up the steps and leans over the half-door. The yellow handkerchief is knotted awry about his nut-brown neck; his "hard-high" hat is pushed to the back of

THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF

his head. His coat is off, his waistcoat hangs unbuttoned, and his glance is wild.

“Sam, let's have your *diklo*!” says Ellenda.

“You can't have it. 'Tis mine!”

“But the Rawny wants to paint it!”

“This is my handkercher, I tells yer! And I doesn't like the same handkercher round too many necks,” he grumbles fastidiously. “Let the lady borrow it for half-a-crown, perhaps,” he hazarded. Ellenda's round, childish face clouds over with displeasure. “Come, give it me! The lady's waitin'.”

“O no, I sha'n't!” says Sam. “And when I says a thing I means it!” he adds, sitting down in a determined attitude at the extreme end of the caravan.

The painter began to laugh. “Then we'll *chor* your *diklo*!”

“Yes, if you won't give it us, Sam, we'll *chor* it off yer!” repeats Ellenda.

“O, will yer?” says he, giving a decided tug to his dishevelled neck gear. “I don't think you will, then, 'cause I wears it all day and has it on when I'm asleep! Not unless the lady comes up at night to get it,” he says to himself, staring straight in front of him with the dreamy, dazed expression which is peculiarly his own.

“Give it to me, now,” says Ellenda, in a cajoling voice, “and the Rawny'll give yer somethin' for it when she comes again. Won't yer?”

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"Yes!" The painter's tone was curter than usual. She wished the argument ended. Time was as precious to her as Sam's yellow handkerchief was to him, for light slipped away fast these dim November days. Hardly had the word left her lips when the *diklo* was wrested off his neck and flung in Ellenda's lap, while she in her turn divested herself of her own multi-coloured scarf and threw it out of the door after her husband's departing form. It was not long that these two remained in undisturbed possession of the green caravan, for Sam kept on reappearing at short and still shorter intervals. Now to look for the chopper, which was on the bench beside the Rauni; next to find his pipe. Then to get his coat. In fact, taking any and every opportunity which presented itself to disturb the work in progress. Muttered sentences in Romany sometimes passed between husband and wife, too low-spoken for even the painter's quick hearing to catch. Luckily enough she had stowed away in her pocket some cigarettes, of her brother's; these she produced, and handed over to the gypsy, whose laughing gaze was either fixed on her from the back of the caravan or at still closer quarters, when he leaned over the oak chest to watch her; nearer and nearer still. "Better go and have a smoke," she suggested; and to her secret joy he laughingly accepted the proffered gift, and left the painter to pursue her work in peace.

"The first time 'twas the baby who was trouble-

THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF

some; now it's Sam!" observed his young wife, looking displeased. "He's hungry, that's why it is! Never had no dinner to-day." But only a very short while elapsed before the outcast felt himself again compelled to rejoin the family circle. This time he took a seat on a low stool by the fire, with the baby on his knees, from whence he could best overlook the portrait, as it grew toward the likeness of his pretty *rakli*. What between the glowing heat of the fire, the wild and mysterious fires of the gypsy's dark-fringed eyes, alternately overshadowing or scintillating with strange lights, and the running fire of his comments, the painter's face grew flushed and her manner somewhat flurried, as she hastily put in the yellow neckerchief with some quick strokes of the brush. "Looks better already, don't it?" he admired. Then, a moment later: "You'll excuse my passing remarks on your work, miss! But where's the white spots on that there handkercher?" The painter murmured absently that she'd put them in after if he would remind her. "Ah! there you is, you see!" he drawled. "I has to overlook your work and see as you does it right!"

Later still, he "couldn't see what them two dark streaks was for?" This also was explained to him by the patient but distracted painter.

As the afternoon light faded without, and the fire glimmered within, affairs both of Romany and Gorgio were discussed by that trio in the green caravan.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Once the conversation turned on to songs—old songs, Romany songs, the painter's own songs, which, she informed them, she was in the habit of writing. She had even made a song on the November Fair, at which they were all present together. "Say some of it now!" the gypsy insisted. "I've forgotten most of it," she hesitated.—"Well, after you've finished your work, I'll hear you say some verses of that there song!" A little later when Sam essayed a song of his own making on the same subject, merry peals of laughter rang through the caravan. And the story of the November Fair was resumed—an old tale, of which they never tired. How they all sat together in a circle on the grass, round the brazier with its brass and copper kettles, and how the dear old gypsy mother handed tea all round, and more and more travellers kept on coming into the fair field, and shaking hands with the Rawny, who treated them all to gingerbread and jam puffs off the stall. How prettily the black Irish horses ran, to the flashing of the red streamers; "stocky little sellers!" the farmers called them. How disconsolately the Exmoor ponies stood, their long tails drooping in the trampled grass! How until that day the Rawny had never heard a word of Ellenda's marriage. How she had recognised her directly she caught sight of her sitting on the cart shaft, drinking Mother Pennifer's tea. Well, the dear old woman was down country now a-travellin'!

Perhaps the Rawny didn't know that Ellenda's

THE YELLOW HANDKERCHIEF

sister had got married? No, had she? And to whom? Was it to any one she knew?

"To a relation—a cousin of ours," Ellenda said.

"Mother an old lady with one eye!" put in Sam.

"And marked with the small-pox?"

"That's it!"

"Ah, then, I do know her—used to know her, that is, rather well," the painter stammered, remembering the strange occasion on which they had made acquaintance, an episode she did not wish to dwell upon in her present company. "I was looking for her all round the heath a year or two ago," she continued.

"To paint her?" the gypsy said, his dreamy eyes fixed on vacancy. And then, to change the subject, the painter spoke of the caravan which had taken up its stand on the reedy island of the pond at Dan Dast, and wondered whose it was.

"House-dwellers they are, like yourselves," remarked Sam. "Well, why not travel, you and your brother? Buy this caravan of me!" he suggested.

"Some day I may travel, but not now."

And it grows quite dusk in the field outside, and in the caravan within, where the painter has put up her painting apparatus, and is pinning her red cap on by the gypsy's mirror.

The acorns are dropping in the red gloom of the leaf-moulded lane as the painter goes home down Merry Oak Dip in the warm November dusk.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

And now she and her brother travel in a yellow caravan. But ever and anon she dreams how the acorns were a-dropping in the lane's red gloom as she went home down Merry Oak Dip. Ah, how doubly sweet, how safe, how comforting that lost home seems to her now—that dim November day's end!

onast, d.
eat old woman
the 1

VIII

Uncle Chawney

BROTHER and sister, *Rai* and *Rauni* turned in to sleep one night out of a world of flashing stars ; sweet was the air with the incense of burning firwood as they went to rest ; he into the yellow caravan, she into a room under the woodbine porch of what was once their old home.

The next morning the Rawny awoke early.

It was the day of the gypsy dance.

She lit her fire at six of the clock, made some tea, and after dressing by firelight drew aside the curtains to let in a flood of golden sunlight. For it was February, and the days had begun to lighten and the twilight to lengthen. Yet it was bitterly cold still, for the old Hampshire saying holds good :—

“ As the day lengthens,
The cold strengthens.”

The milk and the water cans were both iced over

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

inside the caravan ; there had been twenty degrees of frost during the night.

The first thing the Rawny did when she got out of doors was to run round the garden to cut a handful of green bay twigs, and to lay them with their stems crossed in the road ; for, "when you see the sweet green bay leaves lying crossed by the yard gates, that means you're to come in," she had told Ellenda. And Ellenda had answered with a smile, "We calls that *The Patran*."

One gypsy cart after another rattled up the street ; Stanleys with clothes props, Bowers with scaffolding poles, Dynamites with basket chairs.

At last there alighted two gypsy women outside the yard gate. They stood looking up to the door of the yellow caravan and wished the *Rai*, "*Kushti bokhi*," with bows and bobs and curtseys down to the ground. It was Mrs. Noah Chawney, otherwise Aunt Anseryna, and Ellenda.

They had come to tell the Rawny that they would be driving back from the town about one o'clock and would take back the *kussnitch* with the *corvars* along with them, so that the Rawny could follow after on foot in the afternoon, between four and five ; this would give Ellenda time to get the *verdel* ready.

The Rawny having agreed to this, and having presented Mrs. Noah with the *valhanjas* she had coveted, they both departed ; with many dips and curtseys on Mrs. Noah's part, and with a soft and

UNCLE CHAWNEY

gracious "*Kushti saala*" from Ellenda, leaving the Rawny to her morning's work of washing up the silver and china on a table set under the ivied stable wall, while dinner was a-cooking within the oven of the yellow caravan. This done, she proceeded to pack the cakes in a basket, clean and polish up her shoes, as well as the old pair of *chokkas* for Ellenda to dance in ; change her working garb for her best caravan attire (purple velveteen blouse, red beads, a green and red striped *diklo*, a silver ring on her finger and combs in her hair), and, dinner being ended, and the *kussnitch* having jogged on ahead in the gypsy cart, she threw a brown camel's-hair scarf over her shoulder and went forth to the camp of the Romanies.

On the hard frosty ground in front of the four first caravans Sam Stanley sat clothes-peg cutting. Beside him clustered a group of half-grown lads, children and dogs, shivering round two tall braziers which they were raising, red hot with the shavings which fell from Sam's crook-bladed knife. Another young Romany *chal* was chopping furze tops for the horses, and Jim Stanley's cart had just driven in across the common. Aunt Anseryna was kneeling inside the shed door washing clothes, surrounded by enormous iron pots and cauldrons which her lads kept lifting on and off the braziers.

All was a scene of life, light, colour and movement ; the whole camp perpetually shifting and

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

moving like a big kaleidoscope, mingled with laughter and crying, swearing and singing, shouting and jesting, whilst every now and then a wild Romany speech would thrill out fast and furious from the interior of the shed or from over a caravan door.

The Rawny had vanished inside the van of Ellenda, who, the kettle having boiled and the cake and bread and butter being cut, was vainly endeavouring to draw the tardy guests to tea by means of the Rawny's silver whistle.

It was still daylight, so there was no candle lighted as yet in Sam Ellen's caravan, brown without and brown within, where the little gypsy company were drinking their *piameskri*. On a box by the Rawny's side little five-year-old Ellenda nestles up close to her, her dark hair in tiny plaits, her smooth brown face and luminous grey eyes alert with mingled wild gypsy spirits, intelligence and impudence.

"She can *jal* to the *bodikkas* and *putch* for anythink I wants," says her admiring *Dai*.

Young Jim Stanley, in a bright yellow *diklo*, and a suit of clean new drab corded cloth, sits on the other side of little Ellenda. Little Sam, the firelight and the twilight entangled in the gold of his tawny curls, goes from one piece of mischief to another throughout the entire tea-time. He strokes the Rawny's face with his chubby hands, and tries to untie the *diklo* off her neck. "Give that me! I wants that!" he shouts. His pretty *Dai* smiles

UNCLE CHAWNEY

encouragingly, proudly exchanging glances with the Rawny.

"Artful, ain't he?" she murmurs.

"Here, don't you be so brazen, my son!" warns his father. The baby alternately bursts into shrieks of crying, and thrusts his fat fists into the plate on the Rawny's knee, grabbing whatever he can lay hold of. The Rawny gets very little tea, but Ellenda gets less still.

For the whole camp is going and coming on the steps to pick up some share of the spoil. Last of all appears Athaliah Dynamite, her dusky fair face and long hair, tied in five plaits, appearing framed in the caravan door.

"Some tea for granny, what the lady brought," she begs.

"There, you hears that now!" exclaims the long-suffering hostess, whose extended range of duties are rapidly driving her distraught.

"That's *craft*, that is! O, you wouldn't *believe*, miss, how crafty she can be! Now, that's just for *nothing* at all but to find out whether you's brought me any tea, like as you have a-done other times. Isn't that her *craftiness*?" she appealed to Mrs. Vanselo, who pale and thin, but with the gypsy gleam and sparkle in her great dark eyes, sat by the window "over-right" the fireplace.

"Tell her I'll run down and see her presently," said the Rawny to Athaliah.

'GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

While in this manner the tea was disposed of, and while dusk gave place to candle-light in the brown caravan, stories were told by Mrs. Vanselo and the Rawny. The story of the 'Secret that was Never to be Told'; of the gypsy's sister, called to his dying bedside to hear his last words, and how her *mula* is said "to be seen" round about the broken walls of the tumbled-down clay cottage up there in the forest, burdened with this dread confession which she had promised never to reveal. The story of the old gypsy woman who was "all a flame of fire" one night in her tent. How she had been parted from her husband for years, and swore she would "wear a bunch of yellow ribbons" when he died. How strange to relate, they both lay dead together at the last, and were buried side by side in the old church-yard. To finish up with, Mrs. Vanselo told the story of the "*mullen*" place in the wood, where *the water goes bunk*.

"What do you mean by the water going bunk?" asked the Rawny.

"Makes a noise like this," answered she, clapping her hands.

While the brown van is being cleared up for Sam to have his supper, the Rawny throws her brown scarf around her, and slips down through the now quite-dark camp to see Athaliah's grandmother. She hears, rather than sees, the mother outside the little low cottage, washing clothes in a tub on a trestle,

UNCLE CHAWNEY

without any light. Indoors the father sits on the floor, surrounded by a heap of clothes pegs which he is "tinning" as fast as he can go. Betsy and Athaliah are boiling the kettle and laying the table for supper, and their old granny sits by the fire warming her wrinkled hands. Wonderfully old she is; her skin is yellow and discoloured, her wide open eyes, blue-grey, like all of her tribe, stare strangely from under the kerchief tied round her head. As she sits there she *rokkas* to the Rawny concerning many things, and repeats the old carol of the Bitter Withy, where

"The Lord our God
Made a bridge of the streams of the sun,"

and the Rawny promised to come again and hear her sing the tune, out in the dwarf apple green caravan where granny sleeps at night. But the old gypsy's days and nights were fast drawing to a close, and when the Rawny came again, it was but to see the corpse carried out and it was but to hear the wailing of all her kinsfolk in the camp. She bid granny goodbye, and Betsy led her through a labyrinth of cart-shafts back to the upper *Tan*, while the new moon hung red-gold low in the sky, poised like a curved knife blade. And Mrs. Vanselo received her in her own caravan, awaiting the arrival of the chief musician, who had "*gone off with the greis.*"

It was a roomy *vardo*, with three large windows,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

a wide bed-place with a huge gilt lover's knot over the middle of the looped-up curtains and a bright range, giving out intense heat, with a brass rail above holding in their places a row of old china figures. There was a corner cupboard with jugs, cups and plates of the same old china, red, purple and gold. And a locker chest of drawers, with a brass hinge lamp above it. All was light, warm and cheery, and exquisitely clean.

After a while, Ellenda put her elbows on the door, her hair beautifully plaited, her red beads round her neck, her round brown face once more smiling and mischievous.

"We're all ready, but we're waiting for Jimmy. Yes, he's got the mouth-organ and he's gone off with it, along with the horses," complains the Rawny.

"Hark!" says Ellenda.

"Isn't that his whistle out on the common?" All fell silent, listening, and staring out into the darkness. One child after another is sent off to look for the missing musician. Still the camp waits and watches and he does not come. At last Vanselo himself gets restless and goes out to hunt for him. It is decided to begin without him. Betsy and Clary will dance a jig if someone "tunes up" for them.

The children file off into Uncle Chawney's big shed, one of them heading the procession with a long candle, which is stuck down on the ledge of the door,

UNCLE CHAWNEY

Mrs. Vanselo armed with a heather broom to sweep the floor clear for the dancers. Someone opens an inner door, and a flood of light pours out into the shed. The Rawny, glancing in over the other's shoulders, sees a good-sized room, filled with the yellow glow of fire and lamp and fitted up for all the world like a big caravan, with curtains of a gorgeous pattern looped up across a spacious recess, holding a large bed with a coloured quilt, while close by the door Aunt Anseryna, otherwise Mrs. Chawney, sits by the stove which has a black elbowed pipe running up through the roof, boiling her kettles and screeching out rapid sentences in Romanes. Apparently some word of warning is conveyed to Romany ears, for they hastily shut the door and vanish.

Then Clary Stanley and Betsy Dynamite begin to dance, swinging their short skirts in unison, shaking a leg to right and left; higher and higher, till hands touch feet, meeting each other in the middle, clasping waists and swinging round. Back to back they dance, follow each other up and down, face each other once more, and finally whirl round in their places with clapping of hands. And Mrs. Vanselo, kneeling down, claps hers in time to the tune.

Just as the children join hands for the swing dance of "Violets so Blue" there is a wild rush and a hoarse whisper. "Uncle Chawney's coming!" Mrs. Vanselo, hardly knowing what she does, "douts" the candle, catches hold of the Rawny's hand and begins

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

to pull her towards the wrong door, the little dancers clinging on to their skirts.

It was at the same moment that a swarthy face, lit by evil gleaming eyes, loomed up in front of them out of the shadowy shed. "Dance on!" it said. "Dance on! I won't hurt ye! Dance away! I'm not *moto*, I tells yer! It's all *kushto*!"

"We haven't got any music yet," explains the trembling Rawny, gripping tighter hold of Mrs Vanselo's hand. "We're waiting for Jimmy! He's gone off with the horses!"

"Is you *atrashed*?" whispers the gypsy-*jugal*, and as they all tumble up into their respective caravans to light, warmth and safety once more "Dordi, dordi," they laugh, now that the danger is past.

The Rawny lingering on the steps to take a final glance round for the missing musician is horrified by a momentary vision of a dark face peering up at her from between a cart's shafts, with eyes that sparkle like a cat's.

"What's the *gudli*?" says Ellenda, leaning over the van door.

"It's Uncle Chawney! The lady was frightened nearly to death!" Over Ellenda's face flitted a mischievous smile of deep meaning.

"Drunk, was he?"

"Well, not drunk, but had had enough."

"He'll call for his supper presently," continued

UNCLE CHAWNEY

his daughter-in-law. "I've got it here in my oven ! It's keeping hot for him."

"Couldn't he have it now ?" asks the Rawny.

"No, he couldn't !" Mrs. Vanselo shook her dark plaits very decidedly. "We has to wait till he sends for it."

"Here, Clary !" she calls. "Go and ask Uncle Chawney if he's ready for his supper yet."

The small messenger returns. "Yes, he says he'll have it now !"

A covered plate of pork, cabbage and potatoes is produced from the oven and despatched in haste to the ogre, with a caution to Clary not to fall down the steps with it.

"Now we can begin !" says the impatient Rawny.

"No, we can't—wait till he's had it. Then he'll go to bed, d'you see ?"

At this moment a dark face appeared, framed in the caravan door. It was the missing musician. Vanselo himself had got restless and had gone to hunt him up.

"Why, here he is at last ! We thought you were lost !"

"*Dordi*, here he is ! Whatever made you go off like that ?"

"Why, I said I was coming back ! Didn't you hear me say I would ?" he whined.

"Is it safe to begin ?"

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"Safe or not the night is passing quickly, and there's no time for any further dilly-dallying."

A whisper goes round. "To the big doors! The big doors!"

"No, they're not open," demurs the voice of Ellenda, something of a traitress, and always ready to play into her uncle's hands.

"Yes, they are! Jim's been round and unbolted 'em!"

"No, *not* the big doors," insists Ellenda, wanting to lure the Rawny in through the door leading to nearest Uncle Chawney's quarters.

"Yes, the big doors!" they all reply. And all creep softly round on tiptoe, young Jim Stanley carrying a particularly dim lanthorn. Considering all the noise that will presently ensue, and that the walls of the partition are like loopholes for thinness, this precaution strikes one as particularly unnecessary—not to say useless.

The big doors of Uncle Chawney's domain are flung open wide. On a trestle just inside stands an array of huge black pots, kettles and cauldrons. Behind these lie a heap of basket chairs, behind these again are bundles of clothes props and wood in the rough, and at the back of all are some of the gypsy carts resting on their shafts.

The voice of Aunt Anseryna is raised in shrill protest from within, forbidding any of them to interfere with her *covvaws*.

UNCLE CHAWNEY

"We aint a-touchin' of yer *covvaws*," is Ellenda's contemptuous reply. Soon after, she takes a lid off one of her aunt's cherished *covvaws*, and dipping it into the water pot, drinks out of the lid.

"A drop o' cold water to strengthen the stomach."

"Leave the big doors open!" beseeches the Rawny.

"Oh, no! We shall all be froze to death! I knows why that is," Ellenda adds, derisively. "That's so as you can run out quick if you's frightened!"

Jimmy plays up on his mouth organ, with fingers that shake with cold, and the dancing begins.

Suddenly from the gloom of the woodstack corner a harsh voice breaks in on the lilt of the music and the stamping of the step dancers—a greasy raucous voice that chills the blood.

"There's the girl as can dance!" it roared. And Uncle Chawney pointed a grimy forefinger at the form of his daughter-in-law, who was crouching against the big doors; she sunk down lower still, trying to hide herself behind the dancers, while the Rawny stood petrified.

"Get up off the floor and dance!" he roared again. "*Atch opre!*"

"I can't!" murmured she.

"Yes, you can! *Atch oprè!*" he shouts.

"I mustn't! Vanselo won't let me! He says I'm—"

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"I knows all about that!" says the fat brutal voice. "Up with yer now!" The girl staggered to her feet and steadied herself against the doors, as the Rawny whispered :

"Come on, Byda! You'll have to!"

"It'll turn me giddy!" she murmured, her dark eyes distended.

"Never mind! You must! Be quick!"

Fearful of what the drunken ogre might do or say next, the Rawny encouraged her to come forward. Pale as death, and slight as a swaying willow, the girl took her place silently and danced to the applause of Uncle Chawney.

When the dance was ended, and they dared look round, he had vanished as noiselessly as he had appeared. All breathed freely again for a short space; Mrs. Vanselo and the Rawny took hands for "Wait till the moonlight," which is a real Thorney Hill Dance, and a swing dance with Ellenda was beginning when—

"Uncle Chawney!" she calls out. "Here's the lady dancen'!"

"Hush!" The Rawny tore herself away. "No, no! sh!"

It was in the midst of Ellenda's wildest step-dancing, while little Ellen was clinging close to the Rawny's knees for warmth, both being wrapped together in the brown camel's-hair scarf, that the big doors were seen to open slowly and cautiously and a

UNCLE CHAWNEY

second figure crept in. It was that of the unfortunate Sibsy, once the jolliest, fattest, comeliest and freshest in the camp, now a shattered wreck of her former self, with pallid cracked lips, dishevelled hair and a drawn grey face. An awkward cumbrous figure, she approached the astonished *juvals* and whispered in their ears. Now she is *jivven with a mush she is kek romadoed to* and is *shuvali*. Imagine, then, the Rawny's dismay, horror and disgust, when this wretched *rakli* began a solo dance to herself on the shed-floor, writhing, twisting and contorting herself into all manner of ungainly postures, now bending double, now wriggling backwards, hand to hip, muttering to herself, and exclaiming in *Romanes* the while, as if enjoining an invisible partner.

The *raklos* exchanging glances of dumb surprise, at first essay a hoarse laugh, which is taken up by the giggling *chavis* and the tittering *juvals*. Not so the Rawny. Her silent disgust and her strongly uttered disapproval quells the noisy tide of coarse jesting and ribaldry, and dispels the evil spirit. Amid a stillness as profound as it is sad, the poor *shuvali* slinks out of the gypsy circle into the frosty starlight. The big doors close on her and there is only one to wish her good-night. Amid the wet blanketed pause that followed this gross scene, Ellenda is called on for a song. After taking a drink of cold water, in the manner described, she sits on the ground, the baby in her arms, her head resting

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

against the wooden wall which shuts them out from Uncle Chawney's cabin, and with many encouragements from within to "Sing up, girl," she sings the old ballad to which she "*chins the kaushtea*."

" My love was once a sailor boy
(Sailor boy) ;
He ploughs the raging of the sea ;
You wears a badge all on your arm
Which brings his memory back to me.

Chorus.

Then bring me back the one I love !
(One I love !)
Give him, bring him, back to me !
If I only had the one I love,
How happy, happy, should I be !

As I passed by a pollard tree
(Pollard tree)
A leaf blew gently after me !
I picked it up, it did not breathe !
I passed my love and did not speak.

Speak, young man, and don't be shy
(Don't be shy !)
I am the girl that passed you by ;
Here's my hand but not my heart !
Friends we meet and friends we'll part !

I wish my heart was made of glass
(Made of glass),
So you could view it through and through !
So you could see my heart is true ;
How dearly, dearly I love you ! "

UNCLE CHAWNEY

The baby in her arms chimed in with a little crooning note. The ogre from the recesses of his stronghold droned a drowsy, drunken accompaniment, and the gypsy throng joined in husky tones to the sweet, low mournful chorus :

“ So bring me back the one I love !
(One I love !)
Bring him, give him, back to me !
If I only had the one I love,
How happy, happy, I should be ! ”

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

IX

The Apple-Green Caravan

COLD and bitter blows the gusty March wind, whirling the dust about the road, hurrying the grey and yellow clouds across the dismal sky.

The quickset hedges are budding, the briars are breaking into green, but bleak and chill grows the afternoon as the day wears on from two to three o'clock.

And the time of Athaliah's grandmother's burial, the oldest gypsy in the Romany camps on the common, who lived in the dwarf apple-green caravan, is to be at the half-hour.

Down the long lane which leads up from Millers' Pond and Dan-Dast, and passes through the gypsy quarters, black figures are passing to and fro from the old cottages and caravans across the way ; they go in at the last camp-entrance on the left-hand side, over-right a little white cottage with a brown thatch.

And there stands the dwarf green caravan.

Its hatch door stands open ; the glass is broken,

THE APPLE-GREEN CARAVAN

and the rag of a curtain is wasting drearily in the wind, as the fierce gusts sweep round the corner of the hedge.

Between the white cottage and the green caravan a number of black gypsy figures are clustered together; the women and girls in front, the men and lads behind.

Anseryna, the foremost of the women's group, is stepping forward to receive a mossy wreath of flowers from the last-comer, who enters the camp hesitatingly, looking round her with frightened eyes. Aunt Anseryna, her ruddy face streaming with tears, presses her hand in her own hard and toil-worn ones, sobbing out her thanks: "Yes, she's gone, my dear! I knows you minds, my dear! I takes it very kind for you to come, my lady!"

And a whisper and a sign goes round the gypsy throng.

"'Tis the Romany Rawny!"

At the back of the camp stand two long trestle tables, loaded with flowers. In the middle distance the big walnut and green caravans of the Stanleys and Bowers loom up against the troubled sky, their smoking stove-pipes black against the wind-swept grey. And outside, in the lane, stands another still more sombre cluster of black-coated men—waiting, waiting.

Little Clary Stanley comes running down the sloping path from the upper camp, the brightest bit

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

of colour in that dingy picture. She has on a green plaid skirt, and her plaits are tied back with red ribbons. Silver coins twinkle in her ears, and red beads shine round her slender brown neck. She, too, takes the last comer's hand in hers and holds it tight.

Behind her, a large brown cloak thrown over her head and shoulders, runs her handsome mother—one of the tribes of the New Forest, superb in face and figure.

Beyond a slight connection by marriage she owns no real relationship with the old woman of the apple-green van, therefore she will not follow her with the rest of the camp, neither is she in mourning. Lithe as a tigress, and with something of a feline expression in her wonderful eyes, soft and alluring yet treacherous ; with her rose and olive-brown skin, her yellow *diklo*, her glittering golden hoop-earrings, she takes her place by the Rawny's side—a perfect study of a New Forest gypsy of the heath :

"With her eyes," when hazed over in thought, "darker than darkest pansies," and her hair, with its tawny half lights, "more black than ash buds in the front of March."

"Well, Eldoriya !" As calmly and casually as if she had seen her but yesterday, she thus accosts a broad and buxom dame, whose hard brown face is accentuated by the very long golden ear-drops she is wearing, and who has just entered the camp

THE APPLE-GREEN CARAVAN

without apparently evoking any recognition or greeting from the rest of the assembly.

"Well, Syni," is the tentative response, and she turns her gloomy, somewhat yellow-stained eyes interrogatively firstly upon Clary's companion and secondly upon Clary's mother. "This," explains the latter, "is Byda's mother's sister."

"Come over all the ways from Winchester, I 'ave," says Eldoriya in her despondent tone.

"Takes on, don't 'em, poor souls," she says, after a long pause during which two of the girls of the cottage over the way edge up nearer to them, their faces swollen and disfigured with tears, and talk between whiles with Clary's mother.

"Ah, good daughters they was to her," she says, wakening all at once from her listless apathy. "Good daughters they was. Never a Sunday passed but they'd take her up a plate o' their own cooked dinner. Ah, when *my* mother was took," she continued, the beautiful chestnut brown eyes filling with tears, "she was only forty-five, and she left eleven little ones. Theodocia my mother's name was—you remember her, doesn't you, Eldoriya."

"Yes, I knowed Theodocia," she responds, lugubriously.

"My husband," and she turns to the Rawny, "was killed before my very eyes, and *that's* worser nor *this*. Killed by a horse he were." She that was once the jolly, round-faced Sibsy Page hereupon hovers

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

cautiously behind the rest. She is literally in sack-cloth and ashes, her curious assortment of ragged garments being covered with a tattered sleeveless coat worn away to its canvas lining, her woe-begone face begrimed with sooty smuts and smears.

"Run up and see the baby don't fall off," she says, in a rapid stage aside to one of the children standing by.

And still the black group sway back and forward in expectant silence, waiting—watching.

All at once, as if at a given signal, the six sombre men come in from the lane. They go up the steps of the dwarf green caravan and bear thence the long narrow coffin of its late mistress. Laying it on the ground at the foot of the van, they throw back the coverings, then stand aside, as a long low wail rises from the gypsy throng, a wailing cry that chills the blood and freezes one's lips to silence. One after another leaves the throng, and steps to the head of the coffin and stoops down for the last look, and moan after moan shudders through the camp.

With sobs and cries and wild exclamations the whole black crowd close in at last around the coffin from the green caravan, and hide it entirely from view. Even the children, hanging on at the skirts of the crowd, press forward on tip-toe with scared faces. Vanselo's deer-hound limps up behind the boys, but is kicked back.

There are only three who stand still, neither

THE APPLE-GREEN CARAVAN

moving nor crying out—Clary's mother and the Rawny, holding Clary's hand.

"She must have been took with a fit at the last," murmurs Clary's *Dai*, "to look like that."

"Doesn't she look like herself, then?" is the frightened whisper.

"No, missie, she don't."

Wild and fearsome the wails rang on. Sibsy Page in her rags and tatters creeps up nearer, pale and shivering.

"I doesn't like to hear 'em keep on a-cryen' like that," she confided to the Rawny. But Eldoriya, who has rejoined her company, steals softly back and casts a long lingering look up into the empty little green caravan.

"There's her tea-pot a-standen' there still," she whispers to Clary's mother, with the air of one making an important discovery. "I can see her little teapot, poor thing. They ain't took that away then, yet."

And there between the dwarf apple-green caravan, the black gypsy throng and the little white cottage, lay Granny's coffin of shining oak, with its glittering brass ornaments. And the ragged curtain fluttered in the broken glass of her door.

A sudden silence falls. No one cries or moans, no one speaks, as the crowd falls back, and the six sombre men once more coming forward replace the coverings and screw on the lid.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

They lift the coffin and shoulder it. The bystanders draw back.

"Mind, Clary," warned her *Dai*. "Come this way, missie."

In the fear and excitement of the moment her companion and she have loosed hands and gone different ways. One gets behind the cart shafts at the corner. The other runs to her mother's side, as the thirty-six mourners quietly pair off, pick up their wreaths off the trestles, and take their places in silence behind the bearers. In the pause of the wind you can hear the measured tramp of the eighteen couples as they pass down the long gypsy lane. Clary and her Rawny have linked hands again and are running through the upper camp so as to take a short cut across the common and to meet them all at the lych-gate. The whole camp is empty and forlorn now, except for the dogs and one elderly gypsy in rusty black who is wandering up and down aimlessly with a scared dazed countenance, muttering to herself.

"Haven't they eaten anything all the week?" asks the Rawny, mindful of the old Romany customs which prevail among the Shoalwater gypsies.

"None of 'em hasn't touched nothin' since she was first took," Clary answers, "and all of 'em have been sittin' up every night since."

Slowly the long black line of figures winds up the hill, and solemnly they come to a halt before the

THE APPLE-GREEN CARAVAN

lych-gate of that little church under the swaying firs.

As they stand there in the bleak and bitter wind, the gusts grow so fierce and furious that the words of the clergyman are completely carried away by the wind, so that not so much as a murmur reaches the ears of Clary and her Rawny, sheltering behind the hedge.

It is just for all the world as if all the gypsies who have played a part in all the varied scenes of the past years, have gathered together on the stage for the final scene before the curtain falls.

There is Uncle Chawney, the king of the camp, his features still twisted into their habitual leer, though his eyes are cast down. There is Aunt Anseryna walking as chief mourner, a slight form in black, shrunk and bowed with grief. There are Britannia and Amalene, Ellenda's father and mother, their son Walter and their daughter Georgina with her husband. There is Robert Page, the sad-faced young gypsy, who led up the yellow caravan for his father-in-law Chawney. There is Mrs. Clara Stanley, the big "mum" of all the Stanley tribe, Sam and Ellenda of the red caravan with the white horse painted on the door panel, Leah who used to carry the sacks of moss to the caravans under the crooked firs on the edge of the heath, and Jesse, her brother, now grown up and married, whose wife is following with him. Every one of these are interwoven with the

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

web of their Rawny's life story as surely as the silver gossamer threads cross the red tangles of "Ladies' Golden Hair" in the heath.

Two little *raklis* bring up the rear, carrying a bunch of double daffodils and their lady's garland of pink azaleas.

As the eighteen couples file in at the church-door, each one drops the wreath she carried on the grass; so that by and bye a heap of white flowers is piled high by the path like a glorious snowdrift, whose petal snow-flakes tremble and quiver in the wind, as the savage gusts sweep round the churchyard.

Out of the church again the mourners go, each one picking up a wreath as they pass, sobbing and sighing, to the open grave under the rocking firs.

The coffin is lowered and the last few words of the burial service are ended; the gypsy cordon encircles and closes in around the grave; shrill and mournful the wild gypsy keening rises higher and higher, like the scream of the wind through the rigging of a wreck, like the howling of the wind through the keyhole of a deserted house. One after another they turn away, stumbling over the graves, blind with tears, the women shouting and crying incoherent words, leaping and bounding in a strange frenzy, the men following with fear-stricken faces, catching at their arms, and trying to soothe them: "Don't 'ee take on so! don't 'ee now!"

THE ~~LAUGHING~~ ^{LAUGHING} CARAVAN

Last of all to leave her granny's last resting-place under the sighing firs, is little Athaliah—her childish form shaken with sobs, her long plaits heaving on her bowed shoulders, her face hidden in her hands. She used to sleep along with her grandmum o' nights in the little green caravan, share her few joys and sorrows, listen to her stories, her carols, her herb cures, and her Romany *rokrapen*, and she is the one who misses her most of all.

But as for me, I was thinking of the day when I first ascended the steep and narrow steps of the apple-green *verdel*; and how, sitting with the old gypsy within, I had told of my mother's death (our mother's, I should say, for we are four) and of the dream I had not long ago. That I dreamt I came into her room where I had seen her lying stark and still upon her bed, with the memory of it so strong in my mind that I had expected to see it still, but that instead I found her to my intense surprise and joy of heart standing up by the window, a radiant and lovely being, her face suffused with a transcendent happiness, her whole being transformed and clothed with the essence, as it were, of spiritual bliss beyond belief. And running to her with rapture, and clasping her in my arms I cried: "Why, this is like the Resurrection morning! And, look, it *is* spring—a beautiful morning of spring!"

And the old woman had listened thoughtfully, nodding her head once or twice: "Did you say that?

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Ah, then, it's a good sign, a sign your mother is happy, a good sign, that was!"

And so Athaliah's Granny passes on over "the bridge of the streams of the sun," which she used to sing about in the carol of "The Bitter Withy," and the dwarf apple-green caravan has travelled away in smoke and flame, and its place in the camp knows it no more.

X

My Sweet Sister

WHEN the February gloaming deepens on Sheepwash Hill you may see the two Didakai children, Leah and Jesse, trudging home over the heath, carrying on their shoulders two sacks full of feathery moss from the fir-woods, where the wood pigeons begin to flutter and croon.

“ The dove is Mi Duvels’ chiriclo,
The bird of God ;
She flutters o’er the lonely trees,
The wet brown sod ;
And like a rawni son in pawno,
Miri Kushti pen,
She comes and goes as the wild wind blows—
My sweet sister ! ”

Leah has a red shawl flung over her head ; her clothes are torn and ragged ; her sleeves hang in tatters from her bare arms. Round her brown face, with its sweet grey eyes and sad red lips, cluster uncombed locks of curly dark hair. Her voice is hoarse, like a Didakai, her speech and intonation soft

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

and caressing like the dove. The boy Jesse also shows signs of his birth and calling in the orange and red *diklo* round his neck.

"Is your father a gypsy?" the Rawny once thoughtlessly inquired of Jesse by the roadside.

"Well, no, he ain't," replied Jesse with a rising colour, a toss of the head, and a disdainful smile; "he's a trav'ler."

For his father, though a horse-dealer and a maker of clothes-pegs like his dark brother-in-law, whose acquaintance and kinship he scorns to acknowledge in public, is no true Romany, but his wife is of the old royal tribe of Stanley, a Romani *tshai* of the old race, and makes money for herself and the *tshavis* by selling moss to the flower shops in the town. You may often see her "goin' a flowerin'" with her dark sisters, the red shawl over her head, laughing up and down hill.

Very soon Jesse and Leah cross the Portsmouth road and take the bridle track on to the heath. But first of all they stop to rest a while in the shelter of the furze, the stunted oaks and the spindling green broom that hedge the path.

"Better set still a bit," says Jesse to his sister. And he eased her shoulder of its burthen, and put both loads down in the heath. But he himself begins to pick up the wind-broken boughs by the road-side and the "fuz" branches that have been spilt off the carts of green gorse tops which travellers carry home

MY 'SWEET SISTER'

for fodder. He goes on picking up sticks and picking them up till he gets a good-sized bundle of them under his arm. For a hard winter has passed over the heath-camp ; his mother has not made enough money to buy coal of late for the caravan fire, and the February wind is blowing up for snow.

At the end of the bridle-track lies the broad common, with its chocolate-brown turf, its white, red and grey pebble banks, and its stretches of faded ling blossom, lilac, russet, red and green, just like the shawls the travelling women sling their babies in when they trudge home at the close of a winter's day with their half-empty baskets of clothes-pegs and chestnuts, their combs and chinaware.

As the children follow the winding path that leads to the camp under the fir-trees, Jesse's terrier dog leaps out and follows at their heels—a good friend is the Didakai's *jukal*, who *lets the shushais avesh* for their Sunday dinner ; but *maw roka an lendi !* And on the heath the white goat—Jesse's goat—is grazing, and she lifts up her head and bleats after her young master.

Below the brow of the hill, where the heather streams run down between the ridges, stands a group of tall wind-beaten pines, under whose wild out-stretched arms lies the gypsy camp.

A small dark-blue caravan with yellow slatted casements, in which the children sleep, and which they all go away in at strawberry time, and a larger

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

living-waggon, also dark blue, with red roof and windows.

Clothes and rags flutter on the thorn hedge ; the fir-trees rock and sway, and the grey smoke whirls out of the stove chimney, as the wild wind blows.

And as the children come round the hedge some hens flap their wings in welcome from the top of a roughly constructed poultry coop, a cat mews inside the living-van, and a white dove flits down from the top of the red roof and alights at Leah's feet.

“ *Miri kushti pen !*
She comes and goes as the wild wind blows,
My sweet sister ! ”

But all human life appears to have forsaken the camp ; it looks as if it had been left empty a long, long time to the snow-clouded sky, the wild wind and the rocking firs, as the children creep round the cart-shafts and into an open space, the gypsy hearth-place, where the big black pots and kettles stand on a huge trivet under the trees.

No ! All at once a dark laughing face peeps over the hatch door, and the mother runs down the steps carrying the baby, whose waist is girt round with a long scarf of orange and red. And she has a story to tell them. Listen !

Leah's Rawny has been to the camp to see her, and she has brought her a *kushti* striped red blouse, covered with little silver coins, and a *shuba* as well ; and Leah is to put them on at once, instead of her

MY SWEET SISTER

old torn rags. And while they laugh and chatter the father comes in sight in his high brown hat and his brown Newmarket coat, leading his horse into camp.

Dawdi, dawdi, you should see them all when they drive home from Trinity Fair in four months' time! Rattling at lightning speed through the village, with Jesse on the forest pony running behind. You would forget then, as they will, that they had ever been tired, hungry, ragged and cold; that Leah had carried heavy sackloads of coals on her shoulder and fetched buckets of water, picked up firewood under the hedge and carried the heavy baby.

And now, while the furze fire crackles and hisses, and the kettle sings, while supper is preparing for the Didakeis in the fir-tree camp, the carved and gilded doors of the caravan close on the wild wood dove, Leah, let us bid good night, *kushti rarde*, to the world outside, our world of dark heath, ruddying into glowing colours under the sunset, dark green firs with stems empurpled as the mist and the gloom enfold them, swaying and creaking in the bitter blast. Hark to the barges' horns as they come up the river! Hark to the old cherry bells * ringing in the gardens on the village hill! Great rose-crested clouds steer swiftly over seas of dusk. The moon's red-sailed barge floats up over the edge of the common, bearing

* Bells left up in the cherry trees to keep the birds off.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

for the Didakei children a cargo of golden dreams.
Hark to the fir-trees, the wood doves' cradles, how
they rock and swing.

“And sar a rawni in shubô pawno,
Miri kushti pen,
She sovs akei where Romanys lie—
My sweet sister !”

Sombrelly and sorrowfully now those tall firs
watch over the heath. The lord of the manor's
decree has gone forth that every camp must break up
and every caravan must move on. The red roof
under which Leah first saw the light no longer glints
under those brown-scaled fir trunks, those black-
green boughs. Leah's father has taken the black
house on the next heather ridge, close to the brick-
kiln pond, where her boy cousin was drowned ; for,
being no *tatcho Romani chal*, he has no qualms about
becoming that hated thing, the house-dweller. He
has also turned off his gypsy brother-in-law's caravans
from his piece of ground, and his wife, their sister,
goes sad and heavy from morning till night. For he
has sent Leah away, too.

He has made up his mind that to London Leah
must go, to learn to be a servant under his sister,
a housekeeper in a great gentleman's house in a
fashionable square ; she who comes down to the hop-
fields for her holiday, dressed as grand as a lady, and
picks hops with gloves on her hands, to the intense
scorn of all true gypsies.

MY SWEET SISTER

"And did Leah come down, too?" asked her friend the Rawny.

"No, my lady, she didn't. She stayed behind, in the big house."

"And does she like it?" questioned the Rawny.

"No, my lady, that she doesn't!" was the quick reply.

But the Rawny misses the brown face, the shy, grey eyes, the sweet red lips of the laughing gypsy girl. And one December day when she was up in town she went up and looked at the house in the square where Leah lived.

Instead of the sandy path across the heath she saw the hard white pavement; instead of the red-roofed, dark-blue caravan with the red windows, the ugly square-faced house, grim as death, with blinds drawn and gateway chained and padlocked; instead of fragrance of burning furze, the reek of a London fog; instead of the birch and chestnut copse, where the wood-pigeons flutter, the row of spiked iron railings shutting in the dingy laurel bushes, begrimed with dust and soot.

How the Rawny mourned and groaned in spirit for her little friend the gypsy. Oh, that Leah had the wings of a dove that she could flee away and be at rest!

"To sov adrey the rukis in the rardi,
Miri kushti pen!
To come and go as the wild winds blow—
My sweet sister!"

XI

Snowdrops in the Wood

A COLD, mizzly rain blew over the heath, and all round the old house lay mud and rain-pools instead of paths. Inside the gypsy grandmother's one room, by the light of a red wood fire, they sat together, the guest, the girl, the sweetheart, and the grandmother, telling stories of the open road, whose mysteries are many and most of them never unriddled—the while they taught the guest to *tshin* the *kawshta*.*

The hazel sticks in the grandmother's hand moved up and down, up and down, under the crook of the knife against her knee, till all the sticks were shorn of their green-brown rind, which lay in a heap of shavings around her feet. The *rakli*,† her granddaughter, who had been dyeing red barbary leaves to sell to-morrow in the town, stood out in the rainy twilight, washing her face and combing her black hair. Then she bent down with the dark locks falling around her rose and brown face, to look in at the little window, to laugh at baby Rhodi on her

* Cut the wood for clothes pegs.

† Girl.

SNOWDROPS IN THE WOOD

sister's knee, and at her sweetheart sitting by. When she had plaited her hair she came in again to pin up the plaits by the mirror on the wall and to put on a large clean pink apron. All aglow were the gypsy faces in the firelight; the pink coral beads and the golden earrings shone too, and were answered by the tawny, rose-red and orange-yellow of the chrysanthemums in the big market baskets at the back of the room. How the rain poured down! It was too wet to have tea under the cherry tree up the field, so the *rakli* set about laying it indoors, cutting the bread and butter and arranging on the table three old-fashioned farmer's mugs and one cup and saucer for the guest. They were three-handled mugs with coloured pictures and verses on them; and one of them had a bit of black cotton tied round one of its handles. This was the grandmother's mug, and it was done to distinguish it from the others, so that no one else should drink out of it. While the kettle began to hum and the pile of white hazel sticks on the floor grew higher, the guest was telling a forest story of the hand that beckoned and waved out of the fern hedge, and of the ghost in the sand pit, interrupted by such speeches as :

“*Jas** on about your business, *tshavi*! That's what it meant!” And, “*Dawdi, dawdi, dawdi!*† *Mandi* would have *prasty'd* for *mi meriben*!”

* Go on about your business, child!

† I would have run for my life!

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

At last the kettle boiled, and the grandmother, the *rakli*, the guest, and the sweetheart, took their places round the table. Said the grandmother:

"There was such things as *mulas** about at one time! And why not now? Well! I'll tell you! We was once staying over Lockerley way, t'other side Romsey, by Dunbridge, and we'd gone to *tshor rozyas* (this with a wink at the guest) in what they calls Lord's Woods. Coming home under Four Post Hill it grew dark and we lost ourselves. 'Twas Pris with me that time, and she makes out as she knows the way. 'You show it, then,' says I, 'for I don't know it no more than nothen!' Well, we passes Bramshaw Manor and Half Moon Fir Clump, and I was tired, and, to tell you the truth, we goes into a public house further on to have a bit o' bread and cheese and a glass o' ale. Then we goes on again. Pris leads the way, and it takes us down a long, dark lane. Presen'ly I says, 'There's a light on ahead!' 'So there is,' says Pris. 'Must be a 'ouse!' I says. 'That ain't never no 'ouse,' says Pris. And sure enough, when we gets to the place where the light was, all at once, 'Dik at the *mush*!'† I says (this in a rapid whisper). 'Is it a *veshengro*‡?' I says. 'Cause we'd been *tshorin' rozyas*§ as I telled yer, and thinks 'twas him after us. There was a man about so high (here she indicated one of short stature) in a

* Ghosts.

† Keeper.

‡ Look at the man!

§ Stealing flowers.

SNOWDROPS IN THE WOOD

dark blue coat and a tall, high hat, walking alongside of us with a stick in his 'and. When he comes up close along Pris she shudders up against me like this and she says: '*Dawdi, Dawdi!* It's a *mulo!* Whatever shall us do? He'll *mor** us! *Dawdi, Dawdi!*' There he was, keeping alongside of us, plain as plain, when all of a sudden (the grandmother made a quick gesture with her hand) he'd gone—like that! Well, we gets back 'ome at last, and we comes up along o' my husband and we tells him the tale. And it turned out that where that light was there used to be an old house standing by the road, but 'twas all pulled down; and this man was to be seen, they said, walking by where that house stood. *Dawdi!* I shall never forget that night! It was winter-time, and we was after snowdrops."

"In the *vesh*? Wild ones?"

"O yes, wild snowdrops they was! The wood was all white with 'em in places. Withy's the best wood for the clothes pegs," the grandmother concluded. "I'll send you word some *dives* † when I've got some: 'Tis better nor this hazel, and you shall come and put the tin round 'em and nail it down."

And the *rakli* and her sweetheart saw the guest home past the four cross-roads and up the dark hill.

"Ter'ble unked 'tis just here!" says the *rakli*.

* Kill us.

† Day.



THE ROMANY RAWNY ON THE ROAD

PART II

A Whit Monday Wedding

BRIDGET, the flower-girl, the half-gypsy, was married on Whit-Monday. She lives in the little low thatched cottage under the golden pippin tree. Sometimes you may see her mother, with a shawl over her hair, which is worn in two immensely long thick plaits looped up, leading the pony along the moor behind the hedge of the ferny field where the Rawny's camp lies. The Rawny, who lives in two caravans and a tent, and who had promised to be present at some part of the wedding ceremony, tied a yellow silk *diklo* from a clothes prop at the rear of her brown caravan, whilst a red and green "Kingsmer" handkerchief—as the Stanleys call it—waved from a broom handle in the tail-rack of the yellow *vardo*.

But although the two handkerchiefs rose and fell on the light breeze the heat lay scorchingly over the camp as the wedding hour drew nigh; the air lay quivering over the heath, and two miles of dusty high

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

road and breathless green lane lay between the camp and the little brown church below the hill.

Moreover, being Monday, there was much work to do outside and inside the vans; pots and pans to wash up, food to prepare, clothes to get ready for the weekly wash.

So the Rawny watched them drive by from the steps of her caravan. Rose the bridesmaid, a *juval* (married woman) whose husband was to give Bridget away, dressed in her cream wedding-gown of Whit Monday a year ago, and Bridget in pale blue with a torrent of creamy syringa blossoms falling from shoulder to waist. The two young women waved their white bouquets as they passed down to church.

So the day wore on, and an interval elapsed between the church ceremony and the return of the wedding party, during which they all drank and danced in the inn at the Cross Roads, and the Rawny dozed off to sleep in her *vardo*, hot and tired with her morning's work.

All that hot June afternoon the whirr of the grass-cutter and the slash of the scythe went on up and down the hilly fields behind Rose's thatched cottage; and the farmer, when he came home at midday, brought back to the Rawny a bunch of purple brown shimmery grasses which he had saved from under the blade, and a handful of dog daisies. The woodpecker perching in the burnt furze on the hill called down the rain in vain, the snipe clucked and tick-tacked

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

like a clock down in the bog where forget-me-nots and ragged robin blow, and the king fern's seed ripens toward midsummer eve. The "ground honeysuckle" of the forest tent-children lay in rose-coloured patches along the banks of the iron-red heather-stream, and the "dead men's hands" stretched grey and purple-greckled above the bracken.

Now and again a heron screamed over the moor, and as dusk drew on the rattle of the grass-cutter in the meadows gave way to the whirring of the night-jar in the heath.

Rose and Bridget have divested themselves of their bridal attire, also their hats, and their brown-golden and red-golden hair glistens under the sun-glow. Passing "up along" from Rose's cottage Bridget, apparelled in myrtle-green with scarlet ornaments, they pause to ask the Rawny over the hedge whether she is coming up by-and-by to "shake a leg." And thereupon the two fall to dancing in the road, Rose lilting a merry tune; with heads bending, their skirts in hand, they jig a step-dance and whirl each other round, while the Rawny laughs and assures them that she is coming round after tea.

The Rawny and her pal were drinking tea in the yellow caravan when two little half-gypsies stole softly up and sat down on the grass by the tent. Biddy, a house-dweller, or home-dweller, whose grandmother however died in her tent up there in The Green Bushes, where a cross is cut out of the turf. And

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Milly, the tent-dweller, who dances "Fish and Taters." Milly's fair hair was tied back in plaits with pink ribbons, and she wore a dazzling rose-pink pin, flower-shaped, in the bosom of her soiled and bedraggled blouse. For tent-dwellers' clothes, being kept in bags, always look more or less creased and crumpled.

After the Rawny had handed out tea and cake to them, she went up into her own *vardo* to change her blue flowered muslin, her coral beads and her apron for a pink silk blouse, a cream skirt and a large black hat, which she produced from the kettle box. Thus adorned, the three went off up the road together, Milly's arm fondly encircling the Rawny's belt, and Biddy nudging her in secret delight, to see the "dancen' at the wedden'."

But these exuberant spirits received a check before they had quite traversed the distance between the camp and the little old cottage under the golden pippin tree, where Bridget's mother, her hair hanging loose in two thick plaits reaching to her knee, had been boiling her pots and pans for wedding guests all the morning, over big fir-logs on an open hearth.

Three half gypsies, one dark as Egypt, coming up the road from the beer-shop, began to hail the three in front of them with calls and songs and vociferations in the Romany tongue.

"Hark! He's *rokerin'* Romanes! He can't be *māto*!" gasped Biddy, as the Rawny grasping Milly's

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

thin brown hand hurried them both on faster and faster.

They gained the gate just as the three men, who had also been walking faster and faster, turned in after them. The door of the little low cottage under the golden pippin tree stood ajar revealing the guests eating and drinking round a table within. On the top of a table without, the bride's youngest brother was performing a step dance, his father being his sole audience.

To him the Rawny went straightway, the gypsy dark as Egypt following her up closely, and the children whispering in her ear and clinging to her arms.

"He is *marwto*! Yes, he's ter'ble drunk!" they said.

"When does the dancing begin? We've come to see it," announced the Rawny as coolly as she could.

"O, 'twon't be not for a hour, or two hour, yet!" answered the bride's father, himself sober as a judge, as he quelled the stamping of boots on the table with a wave of his hand.

"Then we'll go on into the Green Bushes, shall us? Till they begins," suggested the girls.

But it was with some misgivings that they turned their steps towards the forest.

Before them a herd of cows loitered on their way home from forest to milking-shed. A heifer, as they approached, ran back towards the hollies, and almost

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

trod on the prostrate form of a man, whose face was upturned to the glare of the sun, and whose slouched peaked hat, with a bunch of red and white roses on the brim, lay beside him on the greensward.

“*Dordi, tshavi! Dik at the mush soven aley!* It’s Silas!” And the two *raklis* began to chuckle and giggle. “That *gruvena* pretty nigh walked over him! O, I should have laughed if it had!”

It was the stalwart young half gypsy of Grecian features who lay there. He who, if report were to be believed, was the man who had concealed himself in the bank under the Seven Firs and had sprung out upon the Rawny in the dark, the day of the dance in the Green Road last year. He who insisted on having a word with her in the Romanes whenever he met her in the road. All three wavered at the cross-paths, afraid to pass the sleeping giant. At last, seeing he lay insensible to every sound, they warily stole past him on tip-toe, and entering the gap, were immediately swallowed up, as it were, by the great dense hollies.

“O, look! look!” The others started at Biddy’s wild outcry. But it was only a spray of honeysuckle dangling from the hollies that had excited her cry of wonder. And the moment after she cried out again; but it was merely at a branch of dog roses that thrust their sweet faces forward from the gloom of the bushes.

“Let’s go up the Green Road on to Stony

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

Moor," was the Rawny's first idea, "and see if the butterfly orchis is out." But whilst they paced the green paths in and out and round about the hollies, she stopped suddenly.

"I don't think we'd better," she said.

"Why not?"

"Supposing Silas were to get up presently, and to follow us in here?"

"Yes, he might," Biddy agreed.

"They boys might tell 'n where we was, just as likely as not, they would."

"Then he'd come after we, for certain sure," said the tent-dweller.

The Rawny turned up a bye-path that she remembered. It was what the gypsies call the Devil's Walk, and it led out among the bushes where the blackhearts (bilberries) grow.

"*Ov kersig! Ov kersig!*" she whispered. "*Ma roka a godli!* Hush, don't make a sound!" And as they went it seemed to her as if their skirts brushed and rustled too loudly against the bracken, the furze and ling that almost hid the narrow path. "Don't talk!" she warned the girls. The little tent-dweller's tongue was, however, hard to silence. She was in the midst of a story about the Death Hawk, the black bird with the white breast that hovers about the tents when anyone is going to die—when all at once she ceased her chatter, looked behind her, and without any explanation began to run. Breath-

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

less and panting they fled one behind the other, wondering, would the Devil's Walk never find an end?

At length they saw before them the blue distances of Cranborne Chase and the Wiltshire hills, and the brown expanse of Durdle Down uprose before their relieved gaze.

Finding themselves unpursued they threw themselves down on the turf of the open moor to recover speech and breath.

"She trimbles, don't she?" said the tent-dweller, looking at the Rawny. "See how she trimbles."

"What was it you ran for? Was someone coming?"

"Someone be'ind us, holler'en! Thought it was Silas at first; ter'ble frightened I was!"

"Can you see anyone there now?" They watched the opening of the Devil's Walk apprehensively for some moments.

"There's some'ut moving up there still! A man after cows, I 'lows 'tis! I darn't look to see who 'twas, but that's who I reckons 't might be!"

Their fears having somewhat subsided (though every now and then they rose again at the sight of a "roadster coming up 'long," or at the invisible pursuer in the Devil's Walk) they began to consider what next to do. They gave up the idea, which first presented itself, of going on to Durdle Down to look for the sweet-scented purple orchis that raises its

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

spear of dull rose and lilac flowers from the hummocks of heath. " 'Twill be lonely on the heth to-night," they said. " Dad and Mam and all of 'em's up at the Gospel Tents by now," the tent-dweller said. " Why shouldn't us go up there 'long wi' 'en till the dancen' do begin? 'Twill be safest up 'there, I reckons. Us'll hear they cord-irons dreckly the dancen' begins."

But before the Rawny had fully realized it, she found herself going back by the wrong road, that led directly out to the cross-paths where the drunken half-gypsy still lay. He stirred, he sat up. He got up on his feet, and to the Rawny's intense horror was already half-way down the road behind them, before in fear and trepidation they had passed the thatched cottage under the golden pippin and had gained the bye-lane which led to the Gospel Tents and safety.

Taking along with them another little half-gypsy from under the hedge where she sat ready adorned for the wedding dancing, they sat down on the grass before the good Gospel preacher, whose van and tent stood among the yellow broom bushes. On a bench in front of them Milly's father had but just taken his place—a dour looking, clean-shaven elderly gypsy. Beside him sat young Penfold, of the darkest tribe upon the hill, the gold rings in his ears shining against his dusky olive face. Next to him crouched Milly's brother-in-law, who lives in one of the three

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

tents at the top of Gypsy Hollow, and beside him his pretty young wife Ada, her baby at her breast ; a wild, shy, dark girl of the woods, with soft brown eyes and hair, and a hunted look ; Omi, her sister, also of Indian brownness and of oriental features, straight, save for the slight protruding of the under lip, sat behind with Milly's mother. Ada's baby had a big crimson plume fastened in front of its cap. And more and more tent-dwellers began to troop in, with their dark plaits, their coloured neckerchiefs, and their strange assortment of ragged garments. Amongst these last did Mercy, Milly's sister, appear and gravely shared the Rawny's hymn-book with her, though she could not read. But Biddy had fallen behind to listen to what her brother had to say, and the Rawny feared lest after all she had been drawn in among the drunken wedding guests.

Once more the little tent-gypsy's arm was slid round her Rawny's waist ; now and again she rested her little fair-plaited head and sunburnt face against her shoulder, as she and the two little tent-dwellers sang the old sweet Gospel story together, listened to the preacher's message of good tidings and bent their heads in prayer.

Simple and earnest were the prayers that were offered that night ; simple and few were the words, child-like was the faith that prompted them.

At last, as one after another rose up to preach

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

the Word, a broad New Forest accent fell on ever ready ears and waked unheeding ears to hearken anew. A tall, dark, lithe son of the soil addressed them ; in well known Hampshire dialect the preacher gave utterance.

“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.”

He told them how once he was fern-cutting in the forest and found he had no knowledge of his whereabouts whatever ; lost, he was, completely lost in the trackless forest, and night was coming on. And he left his load of fern and ran and ran to get clear of the trees before he was benighted in the dark and lonesome woods. And he went on running till he emerged at last on a hill-top far off, overlooking the Danesleugh enclosure. And he saw the white road, the Burley road, that would lead him home beneath him, and he knew he was safe.

What a fearsome thing it was, he went on to remind his friends, to be lost in the under-forest with the darkness covering all things ! And what a joy and a relief it was to see the gleam of a house light or a man’s lanthorn.

“And O, my friends,” said the forester, “you who are lost in the dangers and difficulties of this world ! You ignorant and unlearned people, you unread people, whom I am speaking to now, would you, when you got to a light at last, begin to find fault with the manner of light it was ? Would you alto-

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

gether turn your back on and refuse that light that was offered you? Would you say, 'No, that sort of light don't suit me at all; I want something different to help me along the dark road?' Take the Light that is shown you! Take Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Light, without question or murmur. Come to that Light, you who are lost, as I was lost, in the under-forest that night, with the terrible darkness coming on, and be saved by the Light of Lights; 'that was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into this world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on His name.'

• In Him was life, and the Life was the Light of Men."

And while he spoke some gypsies who had been drinking all day came boisterously singing up the lane along with their grass carts and forest ponies, their bottles and their beer pots, and halted outside to listen. And from the Green Bushes afar came the sound of accordions, swaying out ancient tunes for the dancers at the wedding revels.

"Hark!" whispered Milly, the tent-girl, pulling the Rawny's sleeve. "They've begun! The dancen's begun! Let's come!"

"Come on, do!" echoed Biddy, who had come to the camp meeting after all, in search of us, after

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

going on an errand for her brother, and who now stood beside us, hymn-book in hand. "Can't you hear 'em?"

"No, I shan't come! It won't do at all to leave this meeting and go on there amongst all that drinking set! I've determined, since I came in here, that I won't do such a thing! it's wrong," said the Rawny.

The girls still hung on to her, begging her to come. They flushed and paled in excitement; they gazed in her face, watching and waiting for her to come to a different decision. But the Rawny stood firm to her convictions.

"What would your brother-in-law say? Wouldn't he think we'd be very wrong to do such a thing?"

"I 'lows he would," answered the little tent-dweller.

"Well, then, I shall not!"

"Mandy's jassen akeri," the Rawny explained to the rakli's dai, as she led them out of the throng; "Mandy's jassen by the vavva drom so as not to dik lende. We're trasht of sor the mushes soven aley moto, and Mandy'll kek jal to the kellen te-rati!" And the gypsy mother nodded again and again. So the Rawny set off home, avoiding the little old cottage under the golden pippin tree by taking a lane at right angles to it that brought one out to the short cut by the dip-well. Here the two children held her back. "Don't go across there, don't!" they

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

whispered. " *Dordi*, there's another one layen' there *mateto!* Who is it?"

" It's Jim! No, it's Andrew!"

" It can't be Andrew, surely!" The Rawny had visions of a dark *raklo* who had given her some of his mother's red roses a year ago, down in Gypsy Hollow.

" It is, though!"

" Hush, then! Don't speak so loud! He'll hear us!" And, avoiding the path by the dip-well, they stole round to the road, keeping a fearful eye on the fringe of furze that hid the half-gypsy from view. Passing safely under the seven firs, where some say a "*mulo*" is to be seen at nightfall, they reached the caravans in the Ferny field, and drank " moonraker" ginger-ale with honey in it before bidding the Rawny good-bye. The heath was greying over towards night. The wind blew sweet and wild off Whitton Water, whose long ponds lay dimly opaque on the hollow of the brown moor. The cows were going homeward off the heath to the wood-haulier's yard and the ex-keeper's sheds and all the little farmsteads that lie along the highway. The wood-haulier's wife was taking her ponies out over Durdle Down, where the bog cotton waves its white handkerchiefs athwart the dusk, and a horseman was galloping up the Burley road.

From under the dark fir-trees on the hill-top floated strains of gypsy mirth. The dancing was

A WHIT MONDAY WEDDING

afoot and in full swing with step-dance, four-handed dance and gypsy jig.

The little tent-dwellers, who had run back to their mothers' tents for supper, crept cautiously past the green caravan of the half-gypsy Penfolds, whose camp-fire smoke curled grey against the Green Bushes. They were coming up to the dancing after all. The eldest girl had her supper-knife hidden in her hand.

A freckled, frowsy urchin with red hair and of brazen leer, padding swiftly and silently behind them, barefoot over the grass, with evil intent, caught the gleam of steel under Milly's arm as she held it against her belt, and vanished as quickly as he had approached, rejoining the gypsy group around the fire.

It was a knife with a curved blade with which the gypsies strip the bark from the pegs—the *tshuri* that *tshins* the *kausht* for the *fidas*.*

* *i.e.* knife that cuts the wood for the clothes pegs.

The Shovihān

I

THERE is a smother of heather smoke wafted from the turf a-fire on the Wimborne Road. It penetrates into the caravan, and its chokiness adds to the breathless heat. From first thing this morning the farm-carts are bringing in loads of "spire" from the bogs on the further common ; the horses have great bunches of bracken and horse-chestnut leaves tied over each ear to keep off the flies and midges.

The hottest day of the year has begun. Nevertheless all morning I am hard at work preparing and cooking a dinner. And the dinner I am preparing is a savoury one, for in these hot summer days one only cooks once a week. It consists of stuffed roast duck, French beans and new potatoes, followed by a stew of red currants and logan berries. With the humming of bees in the bramble blossom in the hedge the day wore on. At length cool evening comes. I was sitting on the grass outside my van, a cup of tea in hand, when a curious mumbling attracted my attention. A voice that went muttering to itself

THE SHOVIHĀN

all along the hedge—a mad voice that chattered of *verdels*, Romani Raunies and *mishes*; and as I stood up to look at the owner of this strange voice a face peered through the hedge. It was the curious crone—yet not so old, either—whom I had come across seated by the thorn bushes above the dip well, along with the little child, the day of Ringwood Fair. She was staring through a gap in the turf bank, beckoning me with a brown forefinger; and as I hesitated, urging me in the same curious medley of languages to come over and talk to her. “Ah, do, my dear!” croaked she. And at last I obeyed; approaching with caution, I stood up on the bank and looked down on her.

“Where’s the *tikno*?” were the first words I said.

“The *tikno*’s jalled on,” she answered.

And as I approached even nearer still, the confused mumbling and muttering began again. A rambling story, like someone in delirium, or talking in her sleep, about *bori raunies*, *pantch bar*, *dukerin*, and *balgoriya*. Leaning her brown face further through the hedge thorns:

“I’m a deep Romani!” she whispered. And all at once she made a sudden swoop and seized hold of my hand. Turning it palm upward, she held on to it like grim death. I tried to snatch it away. “It’s a *vassavo vast*!” I protested. “I can see that as well as you! And I don’t want any *dukerin*! I don’t want any *boro Rai*. And I don’t want any *romaben*!”

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

She stared at me in a peculiar way.

"Muk mandy duker tuti's vast mi cocores!"

I gave it to her at last. Grasping my hand tightly, as if to prevent my tearing it away from her, she peered closely into the palm of it, tracing the lines with a brown finger, and muttering extremely queer things over them.

I could stand it no longer. "That's a *vassavo* line, that is," I said, growing desperate. "There's *wafudiness* in it and everything else. I don't want to hear it. I—" And I vainly endeavoured to pull it away from her. But she held on with an iron grip, continuing to mutter of prophesies, warnings and prognostications of evil, ending up every sentence with a solemn, "And the Lord be with you!"

My blood ran cold to hear her.

"*Mandy koms tuti*," she rehearsed in Romani rhyme,

*"And tuti koms mandy
If tuti can't kom mandy
Then the beng te let tuti!"*

Suddenly she changed her note. "Listen!" Her light coloured eyes glittered fiercely. She dragged me, still captive by the hand, nearer to herself, heedless of the hedge thorns and brambles. "Listen! What's *bango*?"

"Left—*bango*'s left," I answered, and I held out my left hand, hoping that she would relinquish the other, which, luckily for me, she immediately did.

THE SHOVIHĀN

"*Bango's prison*," she whispered.

She tried me with another word :

"What's *ivimengro*?" I shook my head.

Word after word she tried on me, and with every right answer I gave she flung up her face to the sky and gave vent to a screeching howl.

"A *tringarushi*" was her next demand. I gave her sixpence, all I had, and hoped I should now be rid of her, for she gave me the cold shudders.

I was never more mistaken. She caught hold of my right hand again, dragging it under the thorns, wrenching it, squeezed it so hard that I thought the bones would crack under her iron grip ; stared me in the face to see if my courage was giving way ; and finally wrung it as if she were wringing a rag, and threw it away from her. She next seized my left hand. (I can only suppose that I must have been mesmerized to stand there quite still and let her do as she would. That is, at least, the only way in which I can account for it.)

She took my left hand and kissed it. Finally she said, clear and sharp : "Look me in the face!" Very foolishly, be it confessed, but I can only suppose that her spell was upon me, I looked her straight in the eyes. Hard, glittering, steely-grey eyes they were.

"That'll do now," she said.

To my great relief my pretty gypsy came down the road with a raspberry basket in each hand, for the raspberry-picking was now in full swing. She

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

stood still and looked from one to the other with somewhat of a mocking smile. I beckoned her, in my turn, to come up to the hedge. In her turn she also obeyed and stood by me. In silence together we watched the witch woman's figure crawl away up the road under the Seven Firs. We watched her out of sight. Then my pretty gypsy said :

"I shouldn't go near her no more if I was you."

"I believe she is *divi*," I announced.

"I believe she is *divi*! *Volgeriya's* fair," she added

"What?"

"*Volgeriya*, what she kep' on about; that's *fair*."

"Yes, but there's no *fair* that I know of about here now. I can't think what she means."

"I don't believe she knows what she's a-sayin' of, herself. Drunk, she is. *Moto* as anything!"

"She made me look her in the face. That's to cast a spell over me."

"Ah! overlook you!" assented she. "I believe she could. She came in to me t'other day and frightened me. Kep' on kissin' me and such like. Put my two thumbs into her mouth and said it was for luck. I don't like such goin's on, myself."

As I ran back across the ferny field I saw my aunt, who was lodging for a few weeks in yonder house of ill-luck, down the long green lane, sitting on a camp-stool on the shady side of my caravan.

THE SHOVIHĀN

"Come away, do ! You'd better wash your hands," were the words with which she greeted me.

"Yes, do, my dears ! *I'll* come and help you !" shrilled a dreaded voice behind the hedge.

The witch had come back directly our backs were turned, like some crafty animal of the wilds. She was there again, staring at us under the thorns.

"Hush !" I warned my aunt. "She's heard you." And I ran up my caravan steps to dip my hands, and to make sure my silver ring—the ring of Romany fellowship which the gypsy painter had given me—was still on my third finger, and as I ran back to my aunt I sang a snatch of a gypsy song that had just then come into my mind, I knew not why :

"She opened the door, and all the words she spoke :
My chimney do want sweeping, I'm stifled here with smoke."

"Here, I say ! You're making a great noise to-night," called out my brother from the little tent under the fir tree, where he was vainly endeavouring to write a letter.

Dusk fell. We sat at supper in the yellow van, my brother and I, discussing the day's doings ; and as I told him all that had befallen me with the witch, while the heath darkened and the stars sparkled through the branches of the fir tree, he made a remark that to a house-dweller would sound queer—very much beside the mark indeed. But then we are not house-dwellers, but caravan-dwellers. What he

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

said was: "It's a pity you made me destroy the snake-skin."

"What remains of it," I said, "is hanging up in the little oak tree."

The owls hooted, the watch-dogs barked. It grew quite dark. The hottest day of all the year was ending—ending with strange rumblings and thunderings, rolling over the hummocky hills of the Avon river, with a smothering smell of burning heather and smouldering wood filling all my caravan.

I raised myself in bed and drew aside the chintz window curtain. Was the Yellow Caravan afire? I looked again. There did seem to be an eerie glow by the off front wheel. Had the surze litter under the steps got alight by some mischance? The hollow rumblings rolled again over the river hills. And as I still gazed out of my window I saw a ball of fire flash down from the sky under the grey smoke clouds. Flash after flash skimmed along the ridges, and vast billows of smoke followed the flashes; with lightning above and earth-fire beneath, the hottest day of the whole year was closing—a flaming heaven and a blazing earth.

II

I was standing up in the hedge buying cups and saucers from Johnny the Oilman, whose cart had just come up the road, when a voice struck chill through my veins. A voice that shrilled an incoherent babble

THE SHOVIHĀN

of words, and that drew nearer every moment. The terror of the hill, their "wild, mad dog of the forest," was coming up at a bounding pace. Her evil light-coloured eyes lit up with a strange, unmeaning stare when she caught sight of me. "O, my old dears!" she muttered. "There you is! O, my pretty ladies!" And with her continuous patter of *boro rais, romani raunis, mushes*, and what not, she stood stock still watching my movements.

"*Mandy's butien*," I said, moving her off with a gesture of my head. "*Kinnen' covvars off the mush*," I added shortly. "*Kinnen'! Ah!—*" The crone had stopped short of the cart, her evil gaze fastened on my face. She now came round by the horse's head, and threading her way in between the wheels and the hedge, she threw up her skinny arms, thrust her face forward, opened her mouth so wide as to disclose her lolling tongue, and at the same time stared with her eyes, fixing a peculiarly wild, glittering gaze upon me—glassy and sightless and yet seeing.

I drew back as if I had been stung by a viper; I fell a-trembling, so that I shook from head to foot. My brother, watching these things from the caravans, came up the field and stood by me. He took the cups and saucers from my trembling hands, examining them closely. They were cracked and useless, and as soon as Johnny the Oilman came down out of his cart again, he told him so. Now Johnny the Oilman

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

though almost stone deaf, had the use of his eyes. He threw a comprehensive glance at the witch, then at ourselves, and made haste to his horse's head. It was quite evident that pink cups and saucers, especially broken ones, had lost their interest for me all of a sudden, and that some disturbing element had entered into the proceedings whilst he was rummaging in his cart for more china. He nodded several times in great haste and drew the horse further on up the road. At the same time, another form, that of the farm-mistress, with a haggard countenance which was entirely devoid of any colour and of a greenish pallor, crept up behind the haystack, watching the group.

I was speaking a few words to the hag below the hedge. She stood rooted to the spot, attracted and repelled at the same instant, by the solemn warning I was uttering.

"That's not *Romanes*," she said very sharply. It was easy to see my change of attitude had "brought her up with a round turn." "Whatever it is," I answered slowly, "it's the truth I'm telling you," and hereupon I added several other words to my previous warning, of still graver portent. She lowered her voice—her tone had quite changed.

"They tells me up there at the tents as you is afraid of me," she whispered confidentially.

"So I am," I answered, "when you're drunk. And you've been *lellin'* some *levinor now*," I added sternly, as I retraced my steps after my brother, who

THE SHOVIHĀN

had gone back to the yellow caravan, an oil can in each hand.

"*Jal on ! Mush a vellin !*" I further warned her, as I stood halfway up the steps. The farm-mistress had crept up to the caravans unnoticed by either of us.

"Is that the woman you mean?" Her white lips could hardly frame the words.

"Yes, that's her. O dear, how ill she does make me feel!"

"She come to me," whispered the farm-mistress, "and asked me for a match, and I give her a whole boxful. And then she started *blowing at me with her mouth*, like this, and I says to her, 'What's that for?' 'It's for *when I sees you again*,' she says. And I goes out to call in the cows, but I didn't know what I was a-doin' of. I never heard tell of such strange goin's on, and it upset me dreadful! Exactly like the devil it was. Just exactly like the devil. Has she gone?" The farm-mistress looked at the hedge.

"No, she's not."

The witch was walking backwards, her eyes still drawn in our direction. "May the Lord go with you!" she shrilled. "The Lord be with you every step of the way!"

Then she thrust her face through the hedge.

"Has you got a house?"

"No, I haven't, no more than yourself."

"O, the gypsy lady! The gypsy lady! *Shun*

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

me now!" and she burst into her old Romany refrain:

*"Mandy kom tuti
And tuti kom mandy
If tuti kek kom mandy
Then the leng te lel tuti!"*

I slowly descended the steps and stood down in the field, my arms folded. "*Jal aresh and jal to suttars!*" I commanded her.

Nevertheless I felt sick and ill at ease, and when my aunt came up to the camp that evening I flung myself down at her feet in the grass, complaining dismally and demanding comfort. I could settle to nothing more that night.

And I was all alone in the camp.

My brother had gone into the town six miles away. My aunt had gone home to her lodging in the unlucky house down the long green lane. The moon had not yet risen behind the big dusty fir tree across the road. At last I summoned up resolution to draw water from the cart shed pump before it got pitch dark in there and before the sliding door was shut. I fill and boil the kettles and put on the porridge pot. I wash up the day's dinner things outside on the table by the caravan wheel. And the farm-mistress came up with the evening's milk. She seemed a trifle less depressed.

"I'm going to make myself a cup o' tea," she announced, "and turn in early."

THE SHOVIHĀN

There came before my mind's eye the protruding face, the open mouth, the staring eyes, the outstretched arms of the witch-hag.

"Don't for goodness' sake go to bed till my brother comes back. If that woman comes back and frightens me all alone here in the dark, I should have to kill her."

"Kill her?" The farm-mistress looked up aghast.

"Certainly! Kill her! In self-defence. However, I've put my own spell by my caravan door, so perhaps—"

"Let's see it! Where is it?" She saw, heard, and recoiled. Among the reeds and bog myrtle on my footboard, the dry snake-skin swung and rustled in the wind that blows up each night from the sea.

Snakes in the Forest

A GLORIOUS day dawned over the camp. There was a sea wind and a golden sun ; purple shadows rolled over the grey-green moor ; the hills lay dimly blue beyond. The seeding bog asphodel had plashed orange colour over the bogs, and the bracken was turning yellow and brown.

Several days before the farm-cart had been coming and going continually from the further common, with loads of "spire" for the rick-thatch. The farmer had come up at dinner-time with a bundle of spire-tops, feathery reeds tied with green rushes. Before that he had brought me a bunch of white silky bog cotton ; now it was a king fern-root he held in his hand ; as he came up to the caravan with a sprig of purple heather stuck in the band of his terra-cotta hat I asked him a question : "Seen my snake-skin charm ?"

"Snake-skin—where ?"

He stared at the ground, turning round and round in a bewildered way.

"Not *there* ! Here ! Up on the footboard. Look !"

SNAKES IN THE FOREST

There stood a jar of rosy willow herb, bog myrtle and heather on one side of the door. On the other stood the bundle of spire-grasses. The farmer stared at it in dead silence, for among the dry stalks a speckled snake-skin rustled in the wind. I continued my say :

"When my brother found it down in the bog, it was three feet long. He hung it up in the tent, but I wouldn't let it stay there for fear it would touch my face when I went in the tent to sleep. So he took it away and hung it under the other caravan. And now it's got torn."

"O? What's it for, then?"

The farmer was still staring at it in a dazed way.

"It's for a charm to keep away witches"

The farmer appeared uneasy. "I don't allow there be any of 'em about now," he said slowly, turning his back on both myself and the charm.

"Yes, there are!"

"O?" he said again; "who be 'um, then?"

I answered him with what I thought to be considerable caution. "That Mrs. Cooper is *one*."

"Is she?" The farmer's interest woke up rapidly. He faced round again and stared at me. I went on :

"If she were to see a snake-skin, I daresay she might keep away."

The farmer became more and more interested. He remarked :

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"I've got one or two in my coat-pockets what I've picked up at times."

I became slightly uneasy in my turn at this unexpected announcement.

"Have you? Well, you hang one up over your door—see?"

When I next looked out he was hobbling as quickly as his feet would allow him towards my van, with what looked like a speckled grey band in his fingers. He held it out to me and I hastily backed inside my van door.

"I can't *ever* touch them myself," I hurriedly explained.

"But you take a piece of red stuff, a red rag of some kind, and hang that up over the back door or the cart-shed door—anywhere where she'll see it."

The farmer eyed first the charm in the spire and then the charm in his hand in silence. Then he hobbled off again, the snake-skin dangling from his hand.

Evening came and the farm-mistress was calling in the two cows off the heath. I came through the gate at the same time with a bundle of dry furze sticks, charred sticks, to light a fire outside.

"What's that? A snake?" she said, pointing to one of them which had dropped on the ground.

All up its grey stem it was strangely spotted and speckled. I said:

SNAKES IN THE FOREST

"One might easily pick up a snake over there in mistake for a bit of stick."

"So one might, but I'm always very careful."

"I'm not at all careful! I'm perfectly heedless," I told her. "But if one did catch hold of one instead of a stick and got bitten in the hand, it would be a pretty lash out!"

"Oh!" She waved the thought aside with a gesture of her hand. "Don't talk of such a thing! My other brother," she went on to say, "was cutting clover yesterday and he found one four foot long."

"Was it a snake or an adder?"

"It might have been a viper—couldn't say."

"Where is it now?"

"It's up at my sister-in-law's."

"What's she going to do with it? Could I see it?"

"O, well, I daresay you could!"

The farm-mistress answered my second question first. "'Tis in two halves, you see." The foresters hold to the old belief that if a snake is cut in halves they must be buried apart, or the snake will come together again before sunset.

"I don't know what she's going to do with it," she added; "she didn't tell me."

I thought I knew very well what she would do with it when she heard of the snake-skin charm. It was she who told me of the witch-woman who went to work on her father's fields at harvest time,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

and turned rabbits into mice. Whatever the men had brought along with them, be it bacon or cheese or rabbit, or whatever they had for lunch, when they came to their bundles under the hedge there was nothing there but a handful of live harvest-mice tied up in the handkerchiefs.

"I couldn't say what she's agoin' to do with it," repeated the farm-mistress, "but my brother here, he's agoin'"—here she chuckled to herself—"to nail one over the door to keep witches away."

"I know. 'Twould keep most people away; I couldn't touch one myself for anything you could think of."

"Couldn't 'ee?" with much surprise on the part of the farm-mistress.

"No, I couldn't! Not if one was anywhere near our food, I should never touch that food again. Ugh!"

"Well, I never!" The farmer's sister continued to seem surprised.

"I've got one here, of course," and I nodded towards the gruesome, browny-grey, silvery thing that was swaying and rustling in an uncanny, creepy way in the wind outside my door. "But I should never let our drinking-water come near it. Ugh! Did you go down to your sister's last night?"

This question, though it appeared to change the subject somewhat suddenly, yet bore upon it all the same.

"No, I didn't. She come up herself—why?"

SNAKES IN THE FOREST

"O, only how the cow was getting on!"

"O, the cow's a bit better, poor thing."

The farm-mistress's sister had come up to us a few nights previously to beg for some vaseline for a cow of hers that had been stung in the udder by a snake, on the further common where the spire grows. The danger is of the udder turning black and mortifying.

"There was someone's cow got bitten once," she assured us, "and the cow she lost her whole quarter."

And then she told us of someone else's cow that "'ad got bitten by some'ut, and they wanted to find out what it was. So they sent for *some person** to come and see this 'ere cow. Well, this 'ere 'ooman told they to boil some of the milk. So they milked the cow, and whiles they was a-boilin' of it, the shape of a snake, zigzag lines and all, come out on the top o' the milk! So then they knew for certain what 'twas."

"I haven't seen many snakes to-year," the farm-mistress said, preparing to depart to shut up the cow-sheds, "nor yet killed any. They say if you kills the first snake of the year, you overcomes your enemies. Looks like h'rain to-night, don't it?"

* Probably a wise woman or white witch.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

Kit Candlesticks

ALL day the rain poured down on the camp on the hill. The cooking, the washing up, the keeping up of fires and the fetching of water was nothing but a fight between the four elements. Though both the caravans were shored up with stout fir-poles the sides shook, the springs "gave," and the roof seemed like to blow off, as these wild gusts came roaring over the heath. They rattled the shutters, they knocked at the door and the fir-props creaked like a boat's masts. Until my pal got down and shored both the vans up at both sides, our danger was lest the wind, which was blowing a considerable gale, should shift round to another quarter. At sunset it died down a bit and from all the hills around the forest blazed the bonfire lights. Hurn, Ringwood, Avon Tyrell, Crowe, Durdle Down, Bisterne Close and Burley answered each other in quick succession. Over the forest coast and the Isle of Wight lay a lurid glare. A chain of joy fires lay like a ring around the forest, as the wild moors darkened towards night. While from the

KIT CANDLESTICKS

yellow caravan in the ferny field on the hill-top a sudden blue flame shone athwart the solitary fir tree that guarded the little brown tent.

It was the day of the King's accession. And it was the time of year when the St. John's wort, the golden flower with the blood-red spots on its leaves, stood in the wayside heath, and the clusters of seven roses that forest gypsies call the Seven Lost Sisters, looked down from the hedge.

A hot day followed the storm. A high way and a holiday dawned over the gypsy colony on the hill and the little church-village down below.

Beside the brown caravan door bloomed great bunches of wild white roses and honeysuckle—the gift of the little tent-dwellers to their Romany Rawny. While from the tail rack of either van, gay handkerchiefs of orange-yellow, purple, red and green floated in the soft heather wind.

With an amber comb in her hair, an amber cabochon tied with an orange ribbon round her neck, and a big overall over her white blouse and skirt, the Rawny, with a kettle beside her on the grass, a tea-cloth hung from a fir-prop, and a pile of plates, cups and saucers, silver forks and spoons, basins, pots and pans in a wash bowl on a table set in the leew' of the yellow van.

And as she splashed the water over them, voices hailed her now and again from the hedge against the high road. The gypsies of the hill were trooping by,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

flowers at neck and breast, and bunches of roses in their hands.

" 'Tis to take to my mother's grave, miss," black-eyed Morella said. "I couldn't pass her by without taking her a little something, could I?" she added, pathetically.

"Have you got a pot or a jar to put them in?"

"No, miss, I haven't got nothin'." The Rawny ran back to her table.

"Here's one for you!"

"Thank you, miss! I'll dip it into the stream o' water that runs by under the bridge, and it'll keep 'em nice and fresh."

And Morella passed on, followed by Bridget a minute later in her blue bridal attire—like a blue and tawny butterfly of the heath.

When the crockery was all safely carried up and stowed away in the caravan cupboards, the cats fed and lunch disposed of, the Rawny changed her work-a-day clothes for her second best, and soon herself was crossing the bridge over the running stream, so dark in the shade, so amber clear in the sun, where the gypsy had dipped her water-jar two hours agone.

The seven lost sister roses, sweet and golden of centre, creamy white of petals, opened wide along hedges over which the hay scent drifted; white and dusty lay the long road before her. But all at once a splash of colour, vivid colour, brightens the bend of the road. And Mercy, the tent-dweller, her

KIT CANDLESTICKS

dark hair tied with red ribbon, and her waist with a yellow sash, and Milly, her fair plaits tied up with blue, came running to meet their Rawny. One took her by the hand, and the other passed a hand around her waist, and so together they brought her into the big field.

As they went they talked of the things that had happened since they last met—of the rainy night when the Rawny was to have waited for the two of them at Forest gates. How it rained so hard she couldn't wait any longer and had to go home. How she forgot to lay the *pataran* at the corner of the road she'd taken till she had gone some way, and how she had then gathered green brackens and strewn them along the road, cutting her fingers open with the hard stalks so that they were red with blood. And, lastly, how she had met old Matty, the gypsy tent-dweller, who makes the heather brooms and the bramble baskets, and sent word by him. But it was not he who carried the message to the two little girls after all, but one of three young gypsy chaps who were crouched under the hedge at the cross roads, and who had watched her, laughing, as she threw down the ferns when she took the turning. And they in their turn told their Rawny how they had asked their father if he understood enough "deep Romanes" to talk to the foreign gypsy copper-smiths who had come over to England and were now travelling the country with their wares, should he

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

come across them. For the Rawny had told them all about these beautiful strange travellers with their scarlet skirts, their silver buttons, as big as hen's eggs, their silver-tipped staves, their embroidered tents, and their baskets of solid silver.

"I goes straight to him when I gets 'ome," Milly related, "and I says, 'Father,' I says, 'does you understand to speak the deep Romany,' I says, 'what they do be speakin' as have come over,' I says, 'so as you could talk with them like they do speak it should you come across 'em,' I says."

"What did he say?"

"He says he 'lowed he could if he heard it."

Pretty soon the children's tea-bell rang outside the big tent, and the two little gypsies skipped off, leaving the Rawny sitting down under a hedge with the wood haulier's wife and their cousin Biddy.

The afternoon wore on towards the grown-up people's tea-time. But two of the dark tent-dwellers, Eunice and Richenda, had no tickets, though the others all had theirs ready—Naomi, Britannia, and her husband Jack, and father and mother, the latter with baby Celia in her arms. So when the Rawny had taken tickets for them as well as for herself, they all trooped into the big tent after her, beckoning one to the other to follow, and took their seats on the benches along a side table.

"*Sor Romany foky akei*," she laughed to the mother.

KIT CANDLESTICKS

"*Ovā! Milk the gājos atsh by their cocoros!* They don't want *we!*" As the tea went forward, cries of "*Thād!*" and "*Gādli!*" rung from one *raklo* to *rakli*. The Romany *juvals* held their babes at the breast, their unbuttoned blouses disclosing their tawny skin. As all the teapots emptied, the Romany *chal's* black eyes flashed ferociously. He scowled under his black brows and muttered a threat of killing someone if he didn't get some tea soon. The mother offered her cupful. The Rawny said, "Have mine?" "No, he'd have his own. He'd shy that piece o' bread at 'em too, if they didn't bring 'n quick!" He scowled from side to side. He glared like a wild beast. The Rawny got more and more uneasy. She glanced behind, and saw Biddy eating amongst the *gorgis* at the middle table.

"Ah, she won't eat along o' we! She don't belong to none o' we?" the *raklos* muttered, as she was called up. "Here, Biddy, go and fetch two teapots here as quick as you can. Say we must have it!" And to her great relief, off went Biddy in fearsome haste, and the dark man's rage calmed down for the time being.

"What I wants," he announced in a defiant voice, soon after, "is a piece o' seedy cake!" And Milly's mother handed him the plate in a conciliatory way. "There now!" she said. Milly's father, a tall thin man, brown and smooth-faced, spoke little or nothing during this repast. He was, in fact, silent in three

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

languages, as he spoke good English, and some Hindustani, having served in the Afghan War, and had as fair a knowledge of Romanes as any gypsy present. But he let Jack, his son-in-law, his daughter Britannia's husband, monopolize all the talking, except that his wife kept up an under-current of half Romany clatter, which was as soothing to the Rawny's ears as the gruff grumbling of the black-faced savage opposite her was disturbing. It kept her on tenter-hooks as to what the savage would say or do next, which probably no one knew, not even himself. The *Rashei*, Milly's mother was saying, "was in a reg'lar take on" about there bein' no merry-go-rounds. "Ter'ble put about, he was."

As the black gypsy showed no hint of leaving off his growling, she gave out at length, as a means of soothing the savage beast, that the Rawny had paid for their *raklis'* tea.

"Paid a shilling each, she did!"

The wild man of the woods looked up, interested at last.

He hadn't heard that, he remarked, in milder mood.

"Yes, she did! Didn't you?" The Rawny nodded. "*Dui tingurushi!*" she said. The wild beast's temper was quelled at once, as by a magic touch, so that he presently fell to guffawing at some remark one of the children had let fall, which no one else seemed to have understood.

And they all filed out of the hot tent on to the

KIT CANDLESTICKS

field again. Milly, Mercy and the Rawny went and sat down under a cart, and the half-breed Penfolds of the green caravan up by the Green Bushes, and the Peters' children, whose father makes wire safety pins, followed them everywhere. They laughed boisterously, they danced, they sang, and the darkest of them, a gypsy boy, with loose clothes and a peaked soft hat, kept his bold black eyes fastened on the Rawny and shifting his place just whenever she shifted hers. At last she could stand them no longer, and whispering to Milly, "*Mandy kek kessas for these chavis.*" "Here, let's run," answered she, and they escaped into the crowd at the other end of the field. The Penfolds and Peters pursued them till they got to the edge of the Romany throng, when one of the *raklis*, catching sight of the boy with the bold black eyes, threatened him so angrily as to what she'd do to him if he didn't leave them all alone as to effectually keep them at bay for all the rest of the evening.

And now the sports were passing over and the dancing would soon begin. Bridget, in her blue wedding gown, grew more and more disconsolate as the evening wore on. The *gorgios* had "made a ring" already, and were prancing gaily round in a barn-dance. Said the Rawny: "We'll have our own Romany ring."

But all drew back, shy and morose.

At last the Rawny led off in the ring with Job's

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

wife, who lives in the little white thatched cottage in the "hang o' the hill." Morella and her daughter, Bridget and her mother, Andrew and a *rakli*, followed in quick succession, taking hands for a polka, followed by a waltz, which the Rawny and her partner danced "in Romany kind." But where was Rose, the best dancer of them all?

"I wish she'd come," sighed the Rawny.

"I wish I'd brought my own music," sighed Bridget, more like a heath butterfly than ever in her bridal blue gown, her freckled face and golden red hair, but sad and drooping now like a heath butterfly with folded wings.

"*Jassen akeri*," the Rawny gave out to her partner, as the Romany ring broke up. "*Jassen pāli!*"

As she took her coat and hat from the *rakli* that was holding it for her, one of the others ran out to her from the beer-booth that the landlord of the "Three Tuns" had set up by the gate.

"Come and have a glass o' somethin'?" she cajoled her.

"No, thank you, I never do!"

"Half a glass?" she persisted.

"No, thank you all the same. I'm going home." And the Rawny said good-night to all her Romany circle of friends and left the field, Milly and Mercy by her side once more.

They were going to have supper with her and to

KIT CANDLESTICKS

stay in her camp till their Dades and Dai came up the hill.

The Rawny's brother, who hadn't gone to the fête, was looking out for her and had got a kettle boiling. So he made tea for them all, while the children sat below the steps under the silver half ring of the new moon ashine over the holly bush.

Supper being ended, the *chavis* stole away to the hedge to listen. Detachments of more or less *moto* gypsies, singing, laughing, and shouting, kept passing up the road at longer and longer intervals. At last they heard the sober voices of the returning tent-dwellers and rushed to join them.

The night drew on till near eleven. There was no church clock to strike the hour, but the caravan clock ticked the moments loudly away above the chimney shelf in the yellow *verdel*. All lights were extinguished in cottage, farm and big house—the last to go out being those of the "Mansion" of Lord Marland across the moor. Then died out the row of lights a-twinkle in the distant priory town and the town beside the bay. And all the forest grew dark. A luminous mist lay over the moor. It shifted and listed, and floated away down to the Grey Bog, leaving behind it a strange glimmer, a tongue of flame, that flickered back and forward on the heath. And Rai and Rawny, leaning out over the caravan door, watched this curious light, this blaze of elfin fire, as it darted to and fro behind the dark leaves of the hollies.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

At one time the Rai spoke of going out after this light to see what it was, but the Rawny held him back. Yet all the time it seemed to both of them to be drawing them after it—this dancing light in the well of darkness of the wild moor, where the forest ponies were galloping and snorting, and rattling through the black stumps.

Kit Candlesticks. That is what the farmers call it.

“ ‘Tis an old man’s face in the middle of it, as keeps on laughing at yer!” That is what some of the forest gypsies say. “And old Matty, him as makes the ‘buy-a-brooms,’ he were pret’ night led away by one in a pond round by Dibben over Hythe way. Ah, and would a’ drowned ‘im too, only ‘is son held him back. Jack o’ Lanthorn. That’s what we calls it.”

“Mind how you goes by them sandpits,” say the cottagers of Cuckoo Croft and Clovercroft to their children, as they go off to school, “or Kit Candlesticks ‘ll ‘ave yer!”

Coronation Fête Day is over. The Romany ring of dancers has broken up long since and the dancers dispersed to their homes; but Kit Candlesticks dances the rest of the short midsummer night away over the Grey Bog.

Forest Fires

IN these August days of furnace heat, the blue firmament itself is suffused with a coppery glare, and the blast of the scorching sun begins to scorch from early morning to late afternoon. There are eighty-nine degrees of heat in the leew of the caravans, and what slight breeze begins at daybreak is soon eaten up by the sun.

The nights are the best part of the day. Every evening, when the breeze freshens up from the sea, and the red moon rises, heath fires as red begin to blaze out again on the farther hill ridges over the fir woods. A dull crimson shimmer in the west answers that of the full moon in the east, and the breath of the wind blows hot against one's face as the breath of a furze-heated oven.

The morning had gone by in camp work of much washing up of crockery and of cooking, and in black-berrying along the hedges and bushes of the brackeny field. Two small boys had come up from the Priory town for the day on a visit to their uncles and aunts in both farms, and I had taken them with me for

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

company out on the moor, which has a lonely feel about it at all times, to look for blackberries on the marsh brambles by the three little holly trees where the King fern grows. Under one arm I held a tin dish, and in the other hand the "honeysuckle stick," my "*lucky kausht*," as the gypsies call it, which always travelled back and forward with the caravans, to feel our way over the bogs. But the black swamp, where the golden withy grows higher than one's head, was drying up fast.

Before we had gone round the side of the hill the smaller boy held back and began to whine and whimper. His brother, the eldest of a family of six boys, went over to him, consoled him, and sent him off to his "gramfer's," shouting directions to him as he descended into the hollow between the two hills.

"You go to gramfer's! The next house! Not *that* one, that's Aunt Janet's where the apples is! Where be you a-going to?"

"Is he safe?" I wanted to know, looking anxiously behind me.

"O, he's safe enough!"

But we kept turning our heads to look at him till we ourselves were lost to sight round the curve of the ridge.

There were only redberries on the marsh bramble bushes, not a black one to be seen. So I contented myself with picking a big handful of bog withy to take home to the camp, to keep off flies and insects;

FOREST FIRES

and as we retraced our way, at every step we took the sun grew hotter and hotter, even the merest trickle of water, iron-red, running from the bog-springs, was a cool and refreshing sight.

As we came in sight of the two farms on the hill again a voice was heard calling.

“Is that any one calling us?”

“I ‘lows it’s gramfer wanting me. He was fern cuttin’ just now, and they be takin’ the cart for another load.” For the farmers had been out cutting green bracken on the common long before it was ripe, so as to get at the grass for the cattle.

For what scanty grass there is lies under the furze and fern. Most of it is already dried up; even the daisy leaves are crinkled up as if by a hot iron; and the milk is falling short in the little farms all round.

We listened again. “No! It’s your brother! Is anything wrong?”

“I don’t ‘low ‘t is. What you want?” the eldest of six shouted. “Here, you go on back!”

“He’ll get into a bog if he goes up there!” I warned him. “There’s a Black Bog by that heather spring near the house, but the Grey Bog lies farther down, and it’s dangerous!”

“What’s that, then?”

“A deep bog, all bubbling up with grey mud. The cows got into it one day. Your Aunt Jane

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

didn't know of it till I told her. The cows got into it up to their haunches, and came home drenched in slime, and your Aunt Janet had to take a bundle of furze on a pitch fork and push it down."

"If he goes up by the same path as he come down by he'll be all right," observed this wise head of nine years.

Again we stood still to watch, but by the time we had gained the hill top there was no sign of the boy whatever. His "gramser" alone was to be seen, cutting short furze with a sickle. And I returned to the van and made a blackberry pudding. And if anyone wants to know what cooking under difficulties is like, let them try it on a caravan locker, where there's hardly room to wield the rolling-pin, where it's too hot to have a fire, where the wasps are buzzing round one's head inside, and the farm hens and chickens follow at one's heels as one goes up and down the steps, which one has to do at least a dozen times while that same blackberry dumpling is in course of construction. It was made and eaten, however, assisted by a large brown teapot of China tea. It was, in fact, all we had for dinner, as there was nothing else in the camp, barring a handful of small potatoes. At last the welcome hour of tea-time arrives, and with it came relief to the caravan-dwellers in the shape of a dough seed cake, warm from the baker's.

Now my brother had been hard at it all the after-

FOREST FIRES

noon rubbing up the caravan brasswork, both inside and out, and the whole van was redolent of Blue Bell polish. I therefore took my own tea down in the blackberry field, and feeling refreshed, went up the road to the neat farm to pay for the week's supply of milk, butter, vegetables and cream.

On approaching the Seven Firs, whose great black-green branches swept aslant over the rugged red trunks, bent above the sun-baked soil, I sniffed the smoke of burning wood, the smell of burning turf and furze. Was the farmer's wife baking her cakes to-night? Was she, perhaps, heating her oven with furze faggots? But this was not her day for baking bread.

Volumes of reddish-grey smoke rolled by at the back of the Seven Firs, and as dusk fell a crimson glare heaved up to the north-east. "'Tis the hollies a-fire!" someone said. I was coming home up the green lane from getting eggs at the thatched farm; the twilight was deepening around me and the owl, that haunts the cowshed by the wild duck willow pond in the dingle, was skinning by overhead, carrying something in its beak. All at once I saw crimson tongues of flame licking up the trees of the forest on the dark line of the horizon. I began to run.

As I passed the haystack, the farm-mistress holloaed out to me:

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"Forest fire! I be goin' over to see'n when I've a-locked up house!"

"I'm coming too! Wait for me!" I called back.

It had fallen dark by the time I had returned to the farm house door, and glimpsed candlelight within. The farm-mistress was just locking up. A second figure stood in the shadow of the haystack. The deep soft voice of Gypsy Rose spoke: "Coming to see the *mule* don't get 'old of yer!" she said with a wild laugh. And she, the young gypsy wife and the farm-mistress and I went up the dusty white road in the windy moonlight, for a cold breeze was freshening up from the open moor. As we go we pass first of all the little snug home of the Gypsy Painter, and next the little farmstead where I had been that afternoon, and thirdly, a gypsy labourer's mud cottage; lastly, the wood haulier's yard, and the ex-keeper's thatched roof and wood stacks. Now we stand on the hilltop, on the verge of the great moor, looking down on the heathery plain of Whitton Water.

"Jall'd avesh to dik the *juval*?" Rose asks me. To which I reply: "I'd be atrash'd of *mi meriben* to *jal* and *dik* the *juval*." She was speaking of the witch woman who lives in a hooped tent in the Green Bushes, with one little girl, a "love-child," who is "only going in her eight," who travels about the roads with her, and who is sometimes left to cry outside the public-houses when she goes in. And once she would have been left to "keep house" all

FOREST FIRES

by herself in the Devil's Walk, where they were encamped, had not old Matty, the "buy-a-broom," gypsy, who makes the bent and bramble baskets, offered to "stay along 'ome" in his own little tent, to "take care on she." And this same witch, having once fixed her peculiar wild staring gaze upon me, is now desirous of my company in her little hooped tent in the Green Bushes, to *rakker* with her.

"I wouldn't go *anighst* her no more, if I was you," Rose says, when she has recovered from the peal of laughter with which she received my decided answer.

A group of young *raklos* stood on the brink of the gravel pit, their stalwart figures outlined black against the firelit sky. Rose exchanged a word or two with them in passing, then turned on to a path winding pebble-white through the dark heath, and she and I threw ourselves down on the short grass of the open moor.

"What was that? I thought I heard a rabbit squeak!" she exclaimed. And as she rested on her elbow on the turfs she crooned in a low hoarse voice:

"As me and my two comrades was setting of a snare,
The gamekeeper was watching us, for him we did not care,
For it's my delight of a shiny night at the season of the
year."

We lay on the broad dusky bosom of the moor,

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

which rose hill over hill around us. The shoulder of the next ridge hid us from all but the red smoke of the fire. The night wind blew wild and rough and chill. Every now and then it fanned up the flames, which soared high above our sheltering ridge. Then we became aware that the night, with its moon and its stars, and its fire on the windy heath, was not ours alone. Strange fiery signals flashed out again and again to the left of the beacon.

"That's out to Pixy Pound," Rose said. "P'raps it's to the big 'ouse over there—Lord So-and-so (and she named him), his house, might be."

"Ah, a lucky man he was!" ejaculated the farm-mistress.

"Lucky? How?" I wanted to know.

"Well, he came in for all his mother's money. 'Twas some of his horses as you see running at the races t'other day."

"A queer man the father was," the gypsy then took up the tale, "and lived in the queerest old 'ouse what ever was, along wi' 'is two daughters."

"Never allowed no fire in the house," resumed the farm-mistress.

"Then what did he do when it was cold?" I inquired.

"Put on another coat."

"But what did the daughters do?"

"Did the best they could, I s'pose. One of 'em," the farm-mistress continued after a pause, "killed

FOREST FIRES

herself. Shot herself or poisoned herself, I don't remember what exactly."

"What for, was it?"

"Well, I don't know, unless 'twas a love affair. Some young gentleman as she wasn't allowed to have, very likely."

Over the moonlit moor rushed the wild wind again. The red flames rose higher still, then died down with the wind.

"Used to be a tea there every year," Rose now continued the story for my benefit. "'Twas called the Red House Tea. It lasted three days. People used to come from miles and miles around."

"Listen! I hear voices over there by the fire."

"Someone callin' for help, p'r'aps. Hark!"

We all sat up and listened.

"What's that light? There, over the hollies, can't you see?" Rose fastened her clear grey eyes on the distant forest. "There it comes again! Is it over on the Isle of Wight, or out at sea? No," said she at length, "'tis the light over in one o' they keepers' lodges, that's what 'tis."

"Some o' they old lodges be wunnerful lonesome old places," the farm-mistress said; "nothing but forest all round you and ne'er a house anywheres round."

"Terrible lonesome must be," Rose assented. "I shouldn't like it, should you?" This last question was addressed to me.

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

"Yes, I should."

"What! Live all out in middle o' forest like that? I 'lows 'twould be awful!"

The fierceness of the fire was abating. The hour was late.

"I shall go home to the caravan now and get my supper," I told Rose, as we leapt over the dark tufts of heath and down into the moonlit road.

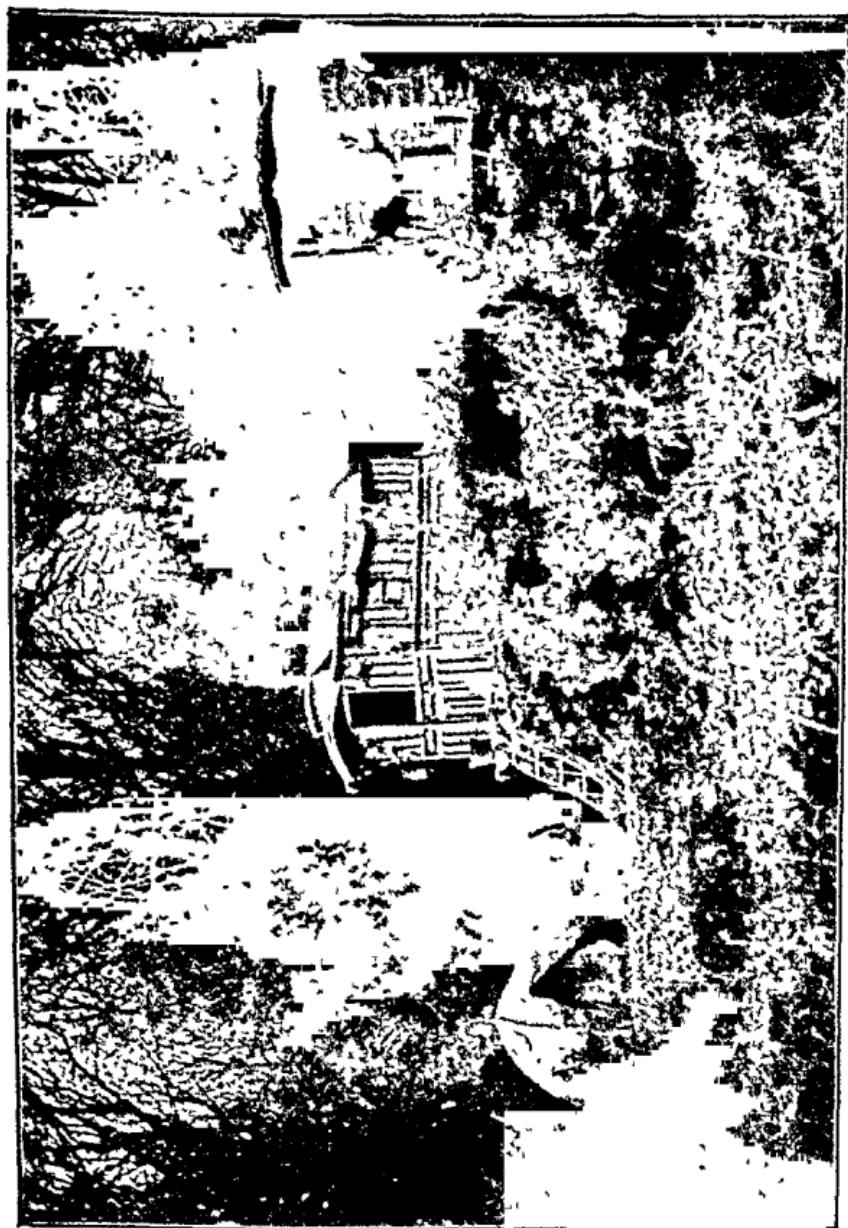
"I hasn't had mine neither. Shall go to bed without," she suggested.

"There isn't anything particular for supper either," I hastily added ; "only eggs and porridge."

The prospect was not inviting.

We went somewhat silently back "home along," wishing a good-night to the haulier's wife, who was sitting on a pile of logs outside her gate.

Out in the brackeny field stood my brother, looking over the hedge at the sinking fire glow still a-quiver in the lower sky. He had not gone over to the fire that night, having work to finish. The day was still to be when he was to come home blackened by burning turf from head to foot, bathed in sweat, and sick with heat of sun and fire ; his head and eyes smarting with the volumes of smoke that had rolled over him, after battling alone with a fire in a fir-wood for hours. And as we ranged up along the hedge he asked us concerning the fire's whereabouts. Over Whitton Water way, some way off, we told him—not in the hollies close at hand.



THE CAMP IN THE FOREST: WHO'S COMING?

FOREST FIRES

"That's a good thing. Anyone up there now?"

"What, in the Green Bushes? Yes, there's people tentin' up there; a-many, I should say," admitted the gypsy, cautiously.

No one willingly gives away the hiding-place of the tents in the Holms. For, if discovered, the keeper is bound to move them on.

"They'd be burnt out of their tents, then, if a fire broke out amongst the hollies?"

"There's the *chovihani juval* for one," I said to Rose aside. Rose clapped the palms of her hands together with supreme delight.

"Twould soon smoke she out! Her'd have to run!" she chuckled, as soon as she could speak for laughing.

"Well, good-night, Rose!"

"Good-night, miss! Sleep well!"

But as we turned into our caravans to sleep that night the crimson glare of a great far-off fire rose and fell over the moor of the black bog where the King fern grows among the bramble and bog myrtle bushes, over the densely dark fir woods where the heather spring runs by the little green birches of the heath.

It is the Seven Weeks' Fire over by what the gypsies call "Three legs across" on the Ringwood Road. It has lain smouldering for days, and now it is breaking out again. Already it has burned down three houses, they say; and a man who lived near by

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

went to bed one night after serving the cows, locking up the horse and seeing his fowls gone safely to roost, and in the morning he found them all burned to ashes.

The smother of its fire fills all the summer night.

The Wolf's Claw and the Wishing Ring

Now we are in mid-June, when the golden broom sweeps the grass so green, the night-jar, the "Jossy Grigory," turns its spinning-wheel song before dawn and dusk, and the willow winds its grey wool. And nearly all the gypsy travellers have gone up-country to the strawberry and pea-picking. Only a few remain, and these may now be seen trudging on foot, or driving in pony-carts back from the town, with their big flower-baskets and their babies, twice or thrice a week.

Chiefest amongst these is the realest gypsy of all the travellers, Morella of the roguish black eye and the rosy-brown face, from the old white cottage on the edge of the Upper Forest.

Now we are in mid-June, when the wind of the heath blows sweet of hay, and strawberries and of honey in Matty's new skeps, plaited of rush and straw ; when the green rings of the tent-dwellers' empty camps in the Green Bushes are surrounded by wild rose, honeysuckle and guelder rose ; when the crimson clover in the fields is cut and the oats stand knee-

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

high ; when the magpie scolds one off the moor, and the squirrels scold one out of the copse, and the wren scolds one away from its nest in the fir-faggots.

One goes up to the little white cottage, that bends so low under its heavy thatch, there on the edge of the Forest. One knocks at a little green door. But not before there is a glimpse of a rose-and-nut-brown cheek at the little window, the glitter of a black eye, the flutter of an apron ; and humming to herself carelessly, the gypsy wife (who has long before you knocked known you were coming) turns her saucy back and vanishes within.

“ O, it’s you, my Lady ! ” says she, with mock surprise. “ I says, here’s a Boro Rauni a-coming ; ooever can it be ? Lor, how *kushy-dikken* you be, to be sure ! ” continues Morella. “ Orange-blossom, too ! ” with a nod towards the syringa on her visitor’s breast, and a glance at the little gypsy girls sitting in the chimney-corner. The little gypsies giggle.

“ Yes,” agreed my Lady, unconcernedly. “ Have a bit ? ”

The two little gypsies laugh aloud. Morella, the wind knocked out of her sails, takes the proffered flower and pin, and proceeds to fasten them into her bodice. She is wearing a white blouse covered by a black woollen cross-over ; her black hair is looped in longed braids over her golden ear-drops, a red and green *diklo* is tied round her neck, with a red bead

WOLF'S CLAW AND WISHING RING

necklace glinting under its folds. Her arms, which she crosses in front of her, as she gazes with a black and a glittering eye of roguishness at my Lady, are blackened by exposure to the scorching sun.

"I've 'ad a letter from a young gen'leman," says she, beginning to get up and explore the dresser-shelf. She lifts every tureen cover, every dish, of that old, dark-purple, red and gold service, looks into every flowered or figured jug and mug, in vain.

"Lor, 'ow silly I be!" she ejaculated. "Been and put that letter somewhere and can't find it. Here, Tom, where did I put that young gen'leman's letter to?"

"'Twas there in the mornen. Can't be gone far," says her son, who tents in the Green Bushes, and who is mounted on a ladder set up in a cherry tree.

When the letter was at last discovered amongst the china, it contained, amongst other things, a reference to a wishing ring, and also said that the writer had searched all London, but unsuccessfully, to find her some of "The Black Boy."

"You ought to know 'im, 'im and 'is sister," continues the gypsy, holding my Lady's eyes with her own black and glittering stare. "Can *dukker* yer with the cards, they can. You should let 'em *dukker* yer. You might be going to marry some *boro rai* who's a-fallen in love with yer! You doesn't know!" . . .

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

My Lady's face droops. She lets her own gaze downfall, lest thoughts and visions of both past, present and future might be surprised and revealed. Those glittering black eyes knew everything, she was sure.

"Here be the ring what I was a-telling yer of," Morella goes on. And from some other hidden nook she produces a large and massive ring of dull silver, set with a huge red stone. My Lady, much admiring, slips it over her ring-finger, watched carefully by the gypsy.

"Don't look at me!" she says, "else I can't wish!"

"No, no! we mustn't look, nor speak, must we?" she says in a soothing voice, "or the wish won't come off."

She withdraws her eyes for a moment only from my Lady's laughing face, whilst a silent wish goes up to heaven. Abstractedly she hands back the ring, whose crimson stone glows like a red heart in its network of silver.

"I've wished now," she says.

"Who is it, I wonder?" says the gypsy cunningly. "Must be a Romany, I should think!"

"You're lucky to have such things given you," says my Lady; "you might have a black wand to bring you everything you want or wish for. A lucky-stick!"

"O' course I be lucky," says Morella oracularly.

WOLF'S CLAW, AND WISHING RING

"Here, *chavis!*" says she, turning to the two little gypsies, "you go outside in the air a bit . . . I has," she confides in a low voice, "*a little ivory hand* what I keeps in my purse, and I wouldn't lose it for nothing in this world. *As long as I keeps that I never wants for money!*"

And now my Lady must fare forth into the dusky hollies that ring around the forest's green lawns—those little round lawns of the tents and the fires on the ground. But before she goes the gypsy wife takes out of her red-and-green *diklo* a curious brooch of a wolf's white claw, set in silver, from which is suspended a little jewelled heart in chains.

"There, I gives that to you!" she says, "for to bring you *kushy bokt!* Yes, 'tis for she to pin in her pretty handkercher"—she relapses into the third person, as a gypsy always does—"and to wear it for good luck!"

As my Lady goes out of the gypsy's green door, the two gypsy children run laughing after her, and join her in the tanglement of paths of the dusky hollies.

It is typical of her life and of theirs, this maze of paths, diving into the dark holly gloom, or emerging into the light and sweetness of bowery lawns amid the heather. First the Devil's Walk, leading off the Green Road, which ends in Stony Moor, off which lies Black Slough.

The two children run round the bushes and hide

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

from her. At whiles she sees a glint of white in the bushes, and calls out :

“ Ah, I see you ! ”

But it is only a little guelder-rose, a wayfaring tree, bending under its heavy blossom-tipped sprays, in some green glade, where the “ wood-manies ”* linger still. Again she fancies she sees their light frocks vanishing into the shade. But it is only a solitary hawthorn tree watching over a deserted camping-ground strewn with the *débris* of old shoes, rags and broken crockery, which are the signs of a tent-dweller’s hasty flitting.

And now the hay is being carried, for we are in mid-most June. The yellow broom of the wayside bears black seed-pods that crack in the sun, and the golden, blood-stained flower of Saint John the Baptist stands upright in the grass of green lanes.

And my Lady goes forth from the gypsy’s green door into the dark heart of the forest, and then homeward, wearing in her neckerchief the wolf’s claw and the heart in chains.

Perhaps this gypsy gift was prophetic of her fate this midsummer eve, when dreams and charms and spells are abroad, and was a sign and a token to her of what was to be. Perhaps it betokened the one whom she had in her thoughts when she slipped over her finger the Romany wishing-ring.

* * * *

* Wood anemones.

WOLF'S CLAW AND WISHING RING

As yet no word had passed ; no bond was made between them. God in heaven only knew what was in his mind towards her. But when they paced together in the gloaming of these mid-June days the little narrow heather paths which the glow-worms had lit with their live lanthorns, she knew that her heart was held in thrall by this tall dark stranger, who only looked but never spoke of love, and who was to meet her on the morrow morn. . . .

It was the wolf's claw, holding the little jewelled heart in chains.

A Red Rose for Love

THIS is a saying of Gypsy Rose's when she either gives or receives a red rose.

Rousing myself, one steamy hot July Sunday afternoon, from a doze under a green oak tree on a grassy bank above the camp, I heard the clang of the great bell of the chapel on the moor, and hastened up the road.

There were two or three reasons why it was imperative for me to be present in All Saints on the hill on this particular afternoon. First and foremost, we were just about to "shift on" down Dorset way, and Gypsy Rose wanted to come to tea for the last time. And the second reason hinged on the first. There was to be a gypsy christening to-day, and the grandmother, who had come down to bring me a big bunch of "mother of thousands" the night before, had brought word that the baby was going to be named after me. And I wished to get up there in time to intercept Rose, take her with me to the christening, and to see the godparents in time to prevent the baby being my namesake. I hadn't



GYPSY CHILDREN: TROUPE OF DANCERS

A RED ROSE FOR LOVE

gone far before Gypsy Rose appeared in sight, with the baby boy, hatless and shoeless, in his old pram, the stern part of which was filled with bowery sprays of red rambler roses, for a present for me. "*A red rose for love.*"

"You weren't coming down *now*, Rose, were you?" I asked, rather unkindly be it owned. But it only wanted a quarter to three by the caravan clock.

"Yes, I *was*, miss," she doubtfully replied. "*I was* a-coming to see *yer*, and I thought I'd get away early because of the rain."

True enough there were signs of rain all round, and great heads of thunder-clouds loomed up over the eastern moors. It seemed to grow closer and steamier every minute.

"Well, turn round and come on to church with me. It's not nearly time for tea yet. There's to be a Romany christening this afternoon, and I've got to be there to see Bridget's baby christened. I've *promised* to be there."

"No, I can't come, miss," Rose pouted rather huffily. "I *isn't* dressed for church. Besides, the Rashai said I weren't to bring baby into church with me. Made me take him out once." Rose had never forgotten this unfortunate incident which had offended her matronly pride, her motherhood, her gypsy love of children, all at the same moment.

"Don't think he cares much for children, do you

GYPSIES OF THE HEATH

miss?" she added scornfully. I passed over this question.

All I said was: "He isn't here!" I felt a terrible traitor to the Rashaï's laws and rules as I made this remark.

"I thought I see the other passon go up this mornen'," Rose observed, hopefully yet dubiously.

"Yes—the real Rashaï's away for three weeks now. Oh, come on, Rose! You look very nice."

"Do I, miss?"—still more hopefully.

"Yes! and put this bunch of red roses into your blouse . . . now pin another one on to mine." About seven minutes flew by whilst we were thus engaged, so that by the time we'd arrived at the Seven Firs and the little church over against them in the heather, we could hear the folk inside singing the Psalms.

"Miss, we's late!" Rose said solemnly, stopping short. "I don't think I'll bring baby in. He'll cry!"

"No, he won't," I said hastily. "I want you with me. Let's all be together for the last time."

"O not the *last* time, miss! Don't you say that," exclaimed Rose, alarmed. "I hope we shall be together again, come the winter, and have music and dancen' and singen' and all!"

"Well, come on *in*!" I urged impatiently.

The little church was filled, except up in the front, so Gypsy Rose, baby Robin and I took our places behind the Boro Rai's pew, with his coroneted

A RED ROSE FOR LOVE

prayer and hymn books laid on his cushioned desk.

The baby slept most of the time in his mother's arms, and when he woke up, his chubby brown hands made havoc of all the books within his reach.

"Baby, baby!" whispered she, warningly. "*Look at the man!*"

The baby turned an inquiring blue eye on to the silver haired Rashai, and let his gaze rest there for some while, with a vast display of interest. It was as if he really understood what the dear "Puro Rashai" was telling us, about boys and girls growing in grace and in the knowledge of God ; his text being on the dayspring arising in our hearts—the "light that shineth more and more until the perfect day."

On the altar tall flowers stood in ranks, rose and white, but the red flowers of the blood-red stones in the iron cross between glowed more deeply than they. Whilst Gypsy Rose's baby played with the little red roses in the bosom of his mother's gown, glimmered softly the Red Roses of Love, Mercy, and Sacrifice above the altar.

Yes, the Rose of the whole world shone there.

As I came down the aisle and joined the gypsy circle round the altar the Puro Rashai whispered to me : "Are you standing godmother?"

"I don't know yet if I have to or not. But I have to be with them, as I have to name the baby!"

"Well, see that they all answer and speak up

'GYPSIES OF THE HEATH'

properly in the responses. That's all I want you to do."

So I named the baby Lavinia Alice, after his gypsy great-aunt and after myself; and the three gypsy mothers and babies filed out of the church door slowly. But where was Rose? I missed her suddenly from my side.

She had run back to where eight graves, newly-made for the most part, and two of them only such little green moulds, showed up against the wide expanse of nut-browns, purples and silvery-greens of the great heather moors, raising and falling in heaving billows of bracken and heather, away towards the distant blue Dorset Rings.

"I went back, miss," she explained, pantingly, as she rejoined us all, thronging out at the gate, "to put that there bunch o' roses on that poor little child's grave. Would you believe it, miss? Her mother passed the grave by and never give her so much as one flower! I couldn't do such a thing as that. You shall have *your* roses another day, miss."

And this last offering was also

"A red rose for love."